THE ART OF
GOD OF WAR™
RAGNARÖK

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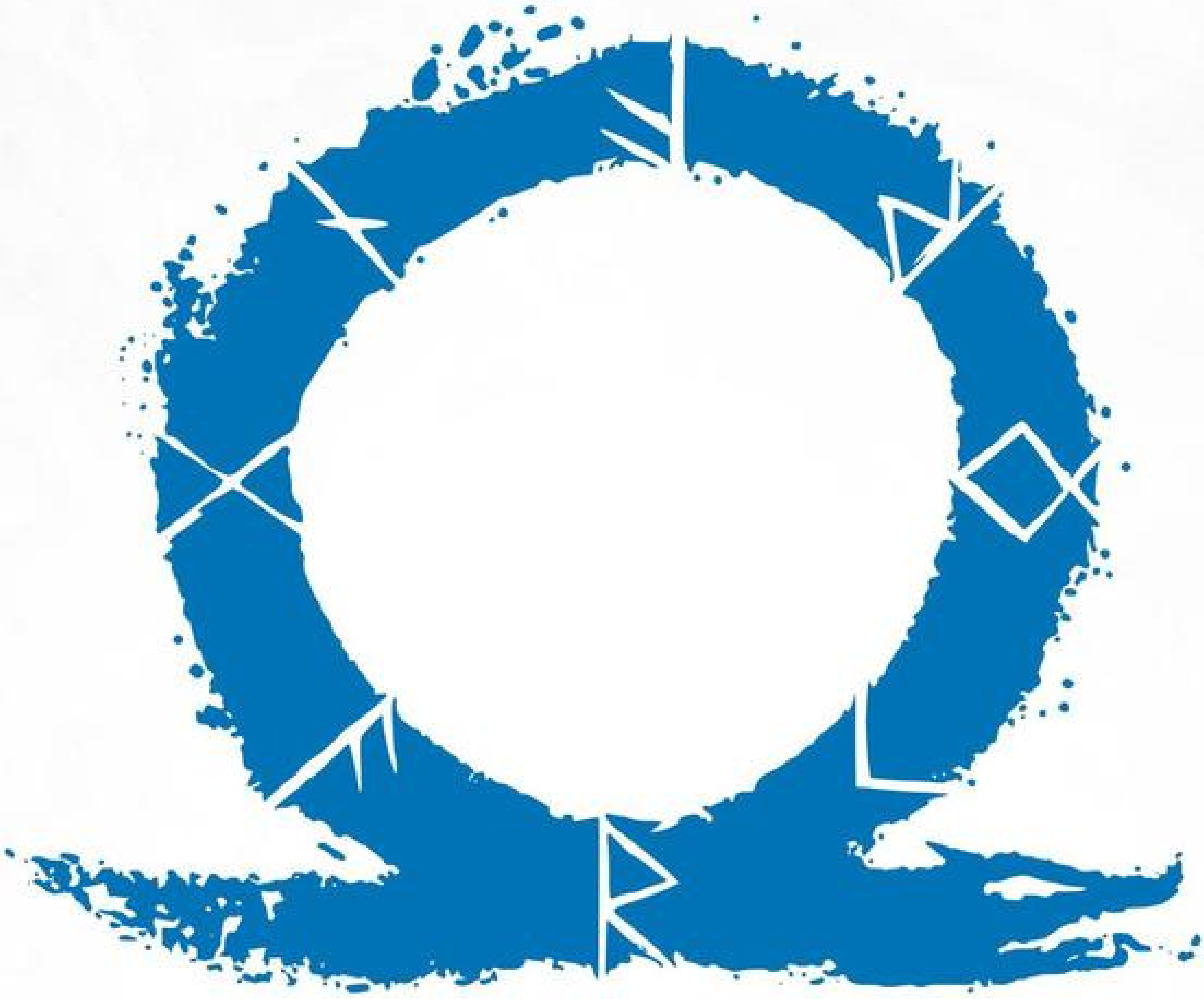
RAGNARÖK

Artist: José Cabrera



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THE ART OF GOD OF WAR™ RAGNARÖK

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Artist: José Cabrera

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INTRODUCTION

***Nothing is written. Fight for family. Holding on and letting go.* As the team at Santa Monica Studio began work on *God of War Ragnarök*, these three guiding phrases directed their ideas.**

When the art team first started dreaming about *Ragnarök*, they didn't have a clear idea of the success of *God of War*. They were proud of their work, but objectivity goes out the window after spending hundreds of hours toiling on a project. But accolades from fans and recognition in the form of hundreds of awards streamed in. The team made sure to enjoy the reactions and celebrate their accomplishment. That success put the wind at their backs as they turned their full attention to *Ragnarök*, bringing back artists from the first installment and welcoming new members to the team. This combination of talents both new and old helped broaden the game's world and move it forward.

While some may have expected a trilogy to tell Kratos and Atreus' story in Midgard, the tale would end with *God of War Ragnarök*. The team put all their efforts into preproduction, generating enough blue-sky ideas for at least two more games, incorporating wondrous and weird visions from all corners of Norse mythology. Sharing these concepts and enthusiasm spread renewed excitement that kicked the process into high gear across the teams.

Their ambition to include as much content as possible in *Ragnarök* created a daunting challenge. They had to pour all of their narrative and artistic concepts and materials into the story in an organic fashion. The pacing had to be just right, not frenetic or overstuffed with events. It led them to create the largest game they'd ever made, with more variety than ever before.

With *God of War* under their belts, the team had a strong foundation of visual language and reference material. They carried more confidence into *Ragnarök* because they'd already determined the art direction with the 2018 game, which meant that here, they knew what they were doing—it was the time to push ideas and to give another assessment to concepts that didn't make it into the first game. Director Eric Williams opened an idea box for anyone to share thoughts and express what they wanted to see in the game for everything from lore to boss fights. This open door fostered free-flowing ideas and collaboration.

The team had an initial period in the studio during which the whole scope of the game was established: the timeline, the realms, everything all in one place for everyone to see in the form of an inspiration book. This aligned the team on the overall vision. Thankfully, they had this time to get on the same page before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and forced everyone to work from home, as they already had a common mindset and knew what they were making. They could focus on overcoming the other plentiful obstacles of transitioning to a work-from-home environment, like how to reestablish the pipeline and conduct reviews of high-quality art with the unreliable nature of streaming through virtual meetings. But whenever issues arose, Sony provided the tools and the support to solve the problems and enable them to continue their work.

As the art departments continued Kratos and Atreus' story following the revelations of *God of War*, the team went back to familiar faces and realms and dreamed up new, rich destinations and characters, all as extraordinary as the previous game's. They strove to make a sequel that wasn't just a sequel. A game that could stand on its own legs and be as impressive, if not more so, than what came before. This book showcases that ambition as it accompanies the artists on their journey to make *God of War Ragnarök*. The following pages show how concepts evolved from the early brushstrokes placed in initial illustrations to their final form. We'll see the artists explore designs for fantastical creatures and landscapes, not all of which made it into the game, as they take Kratos and Atreus to the end of their adventure.

Artist: Mark Castanon

I

REVISITING A WORLD

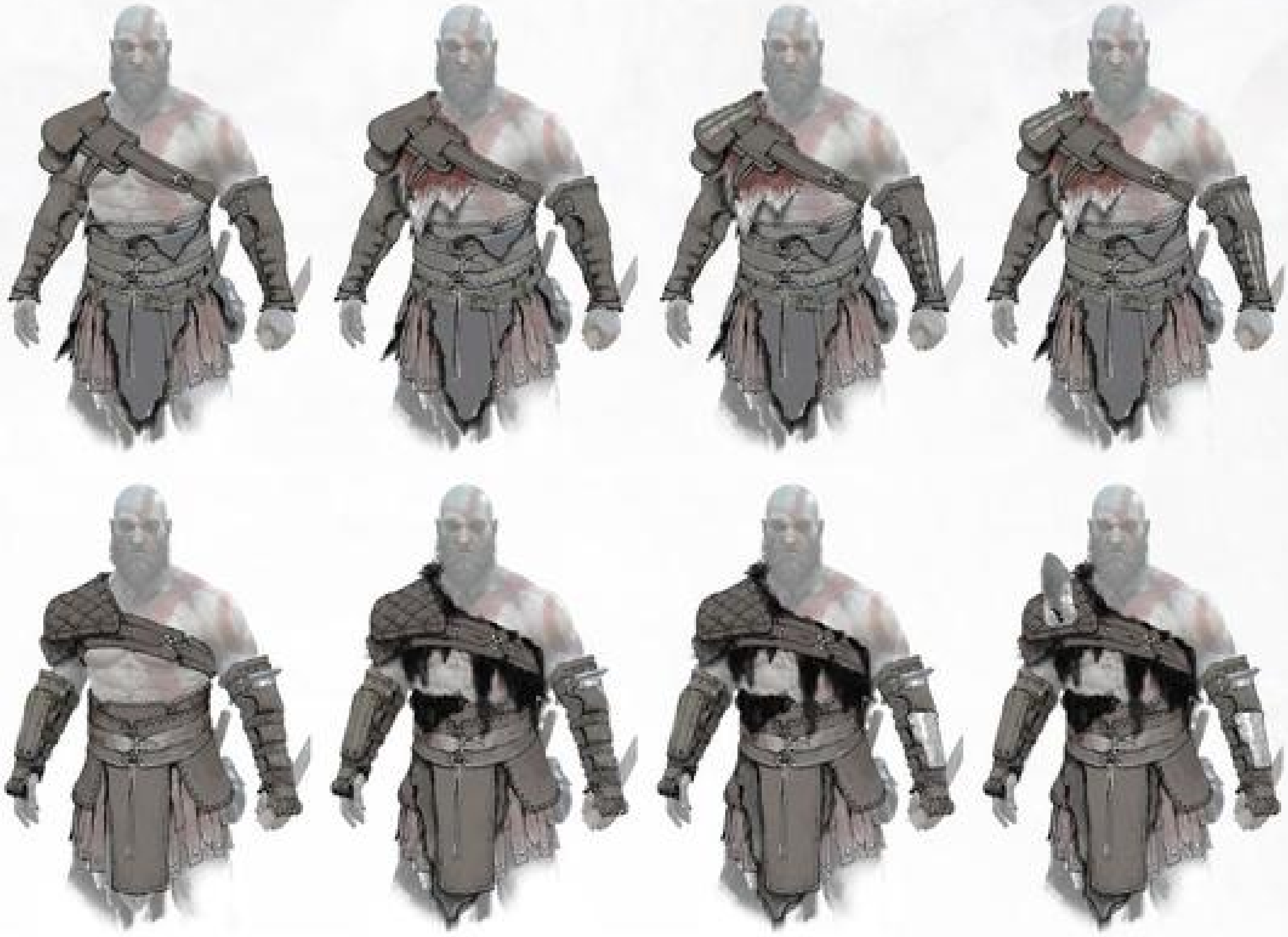
For the previous *God of War* game, a huge challenge was determining the art direction for the entirely new setting. With *God of War Ragnarök*, the team was able to jump right in. They knew right away that they would visit all nine realms this time, whereas the first game was grounded in Midgard. Here, they could lean into wilder and more whimsical ideas. Art director Rafael Grassetti said, “Preproduction was so important for us to just pitch things that we wanted to do last time, but as we expanded, it became challenging to build so much within the same rule sets.”

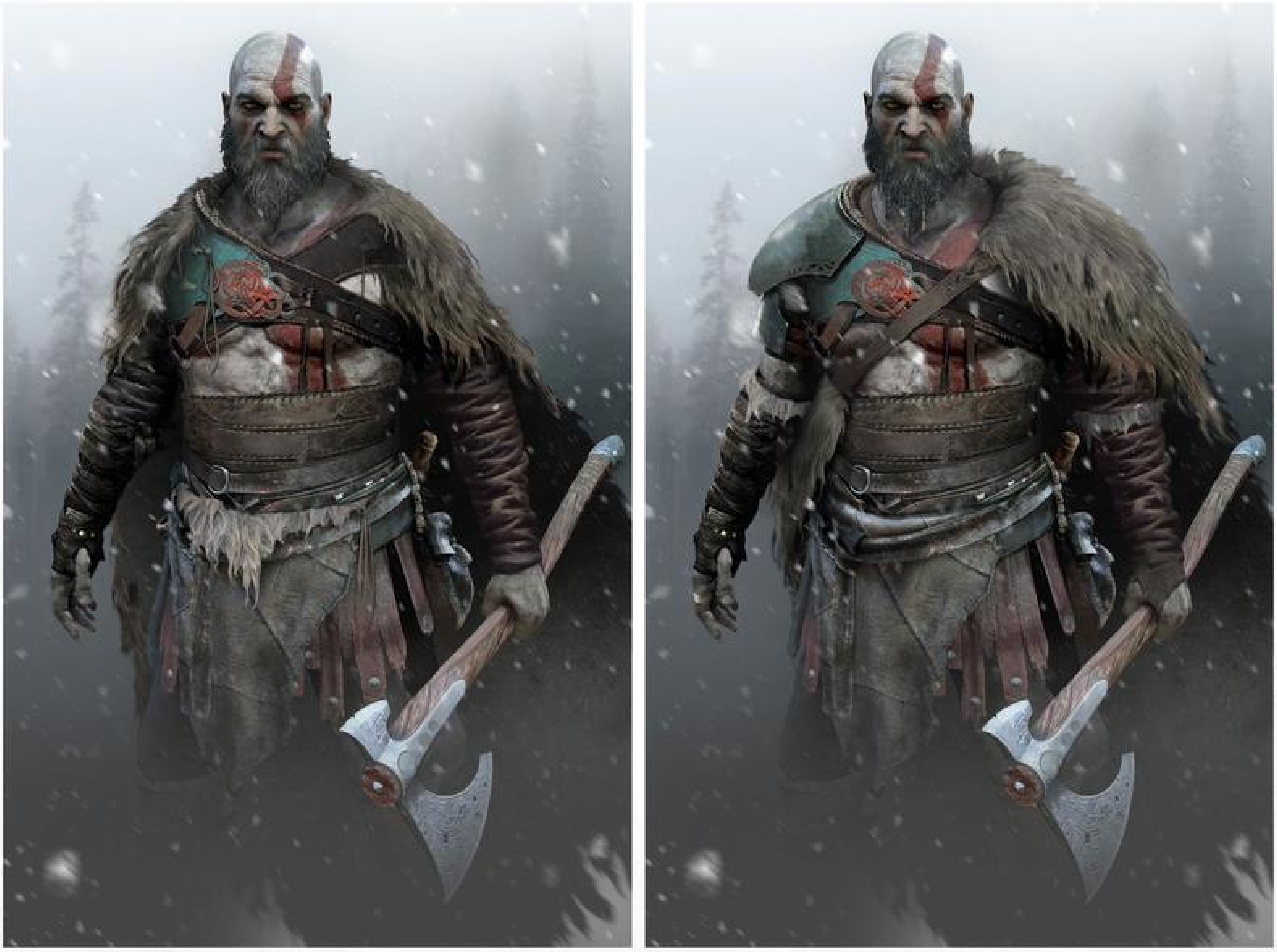
The Norse mythology they had established left room for creativity and expansion, so while they used the foundation from *God of War*, the team had to adapt to allow for all the additions. This enabled them to hit the ground running, building assets and collaborating across departments.

KRATOS

In 2018's *God of War*, Kratos proved to be one of the most challenging designs for the team. They needed to update the character's iconic look while providing a visual continuity to his costume and face. For *Ragnarök*, they considered how that costume might continue to change. "Without the Huldra brothers being around during Fimbulwinter, we tried to reflect that in the design of his costume," art director Rafael Grassetti said.

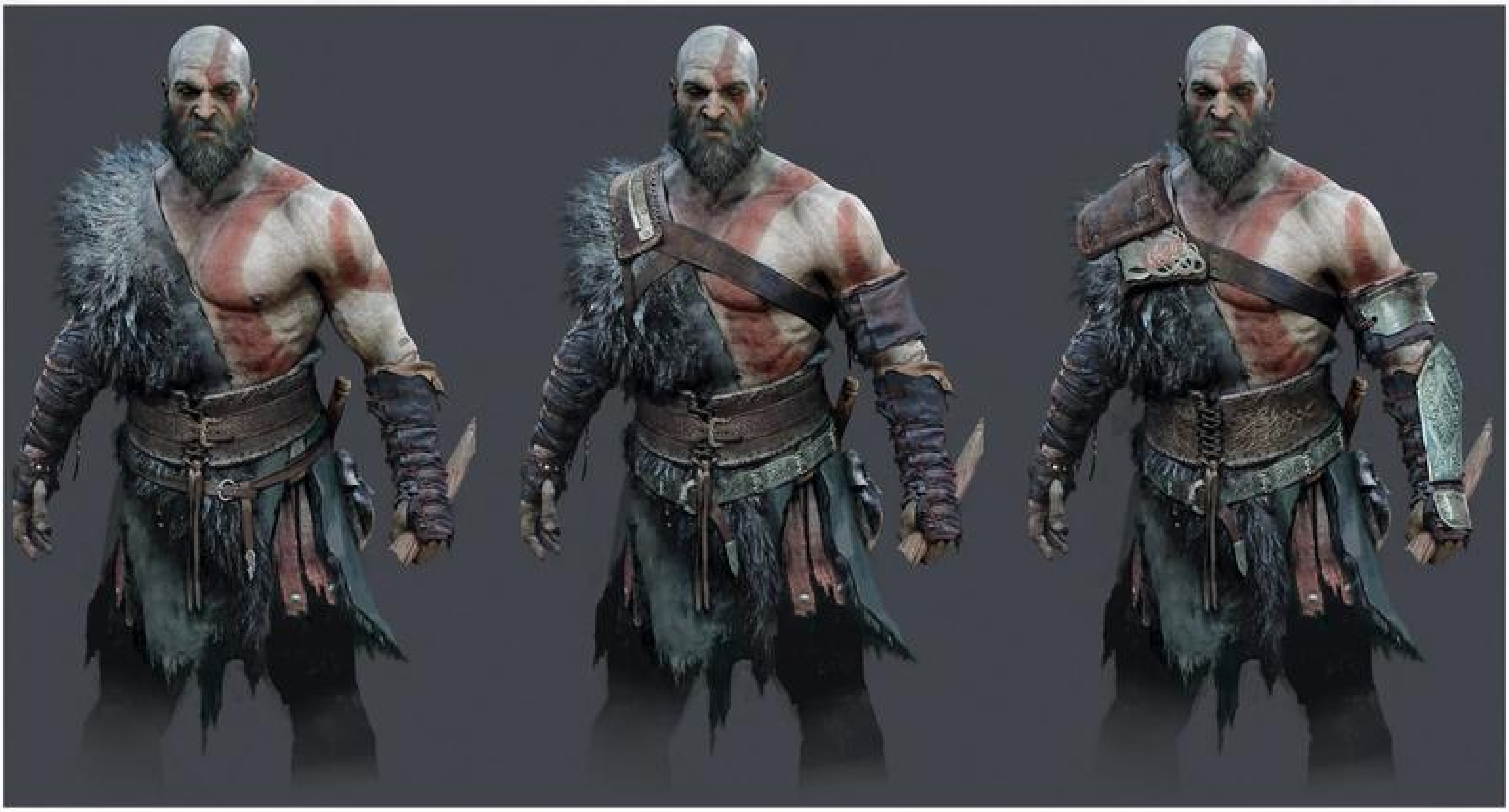
"You can see that in a lot of the elements, like the use of metal on top of leather, how the leather is stitched together, how the fur is put together reflects this. The balance between the lived-in elements combined with a slick design has always been the challenging and fun part of designing these characters."

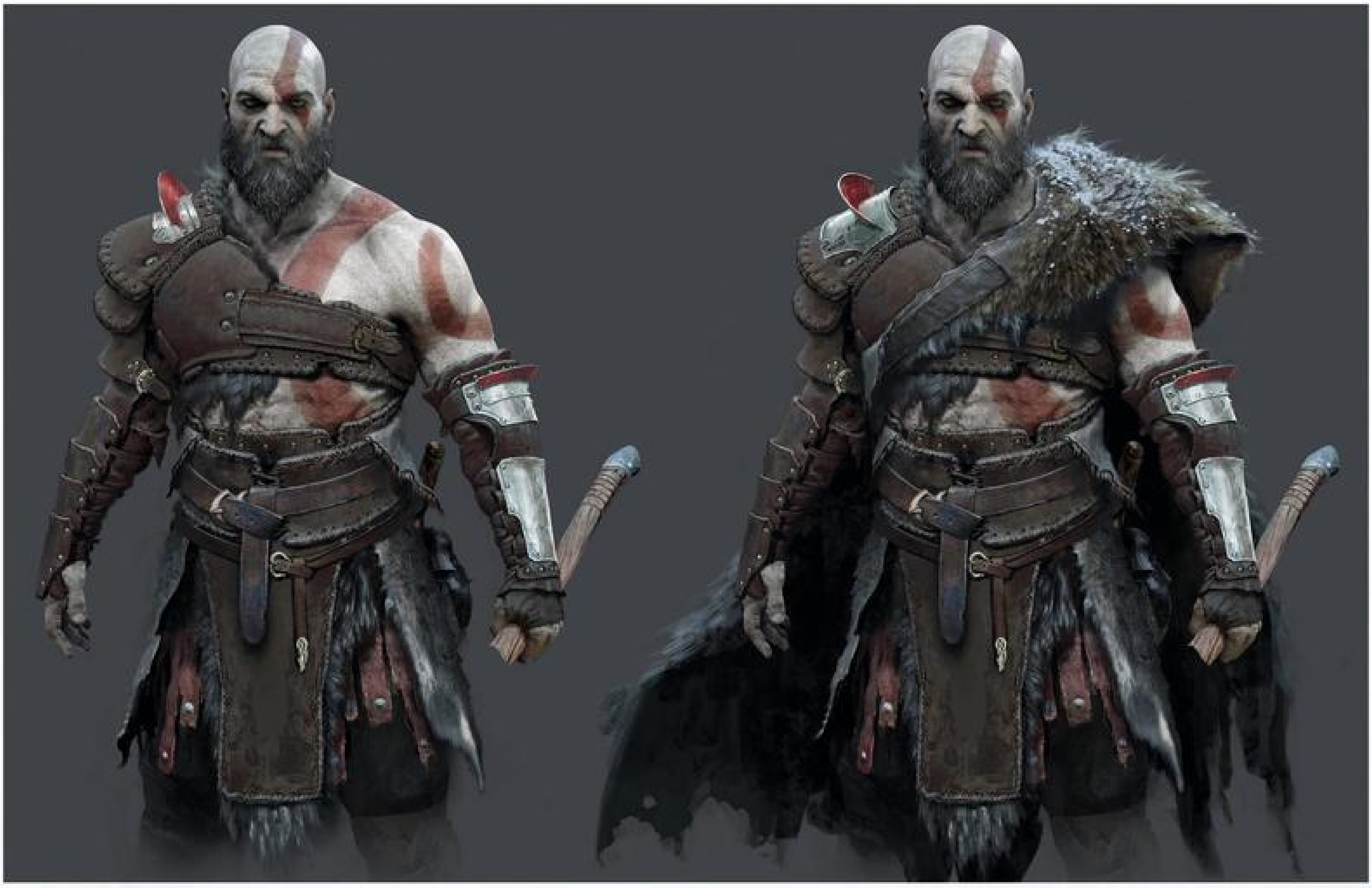




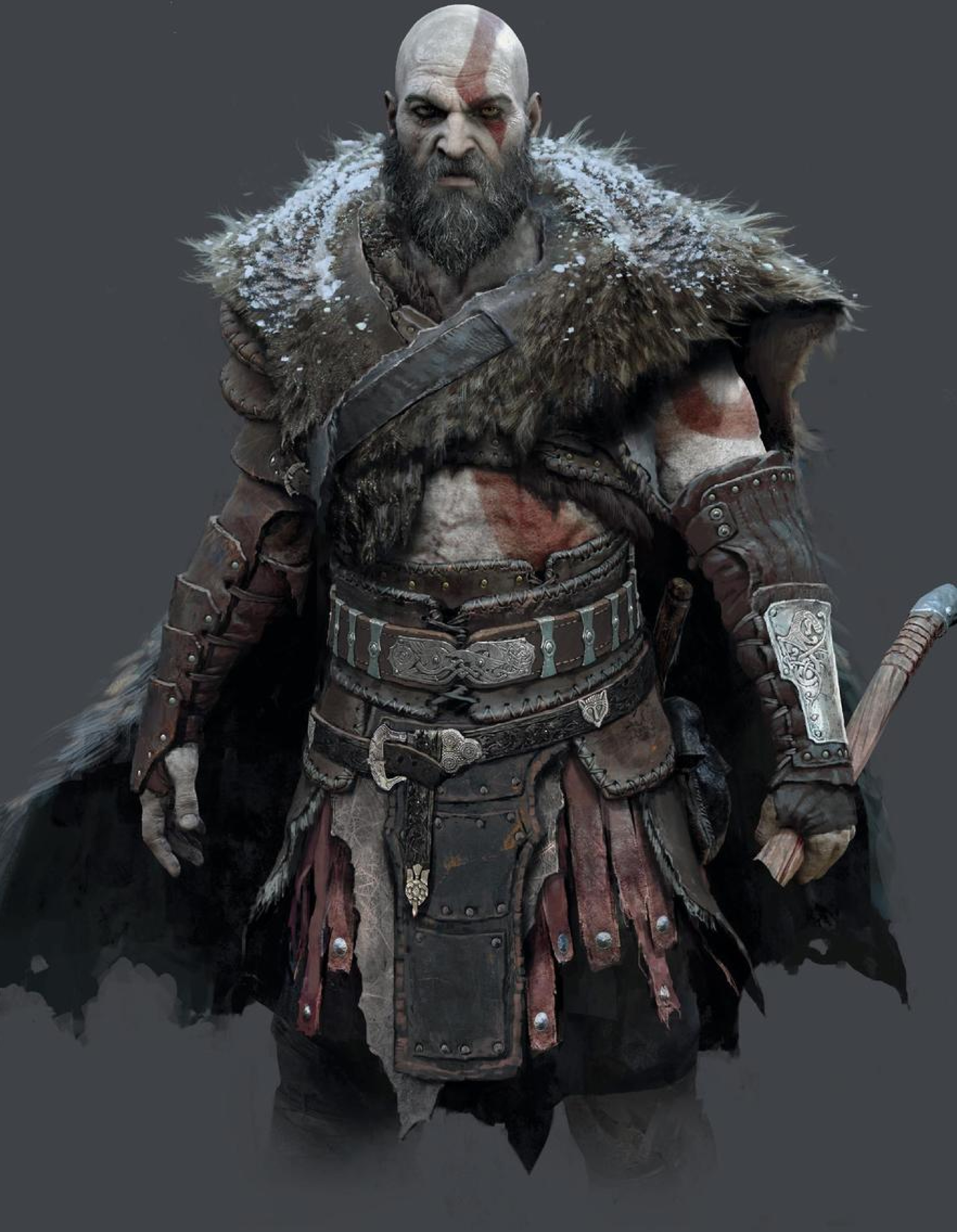
Preparing Kratos for Fimbulwinter. Artists: José Cabrera (top); Dela Longfish (bottom and opposite)

Updating Kratos' pauldron. Artist: José Cabrera





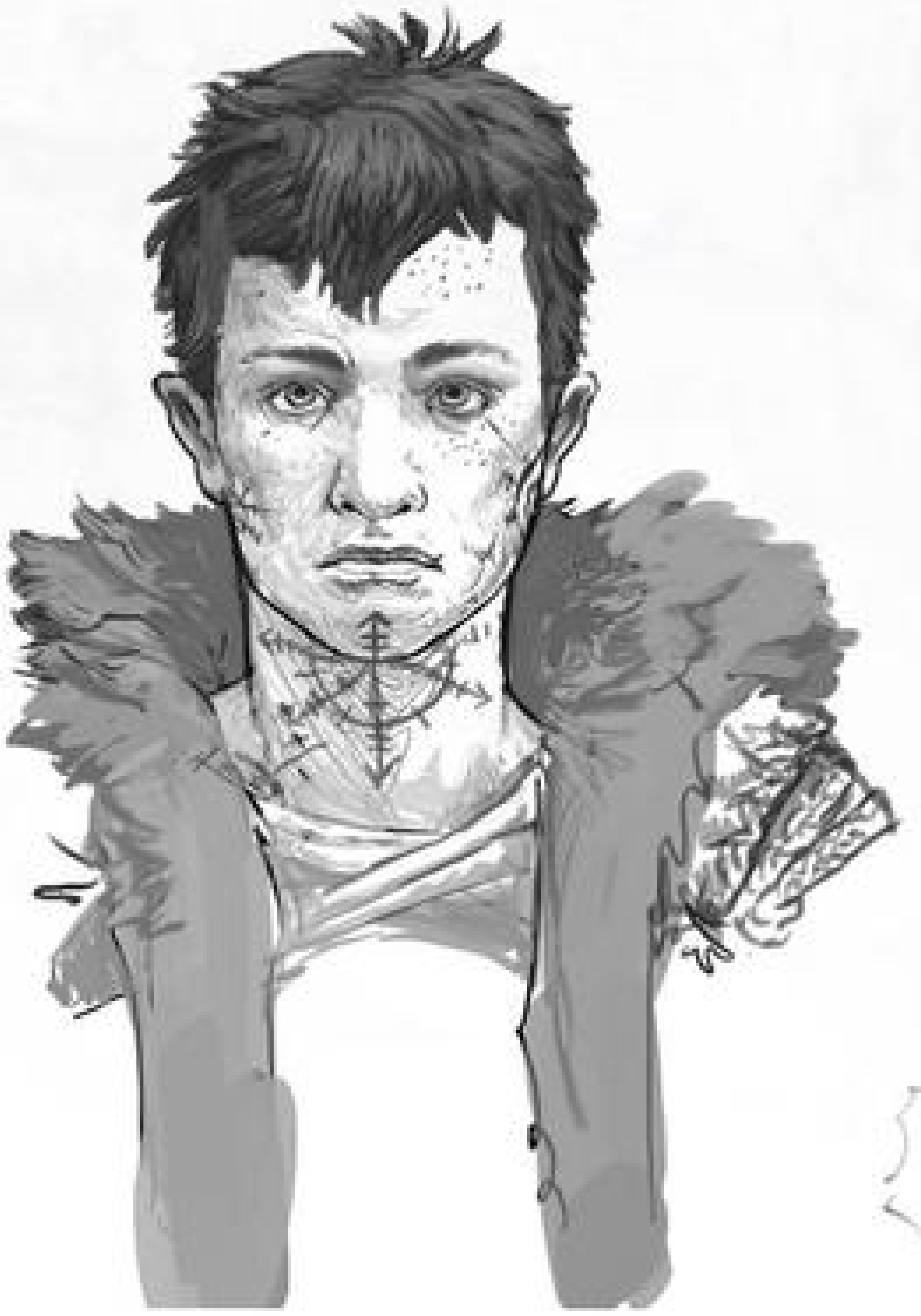
Even with adjustments to his costume, the artists were careful to make sure that Kratos was still recognizable as Kratos. His original character design is elegant and strong, and the team didn't want to distort him into a more generic hero by pushing his costume too far in any one direction. Concept artist José Cabrera said, "Kratos is aggressive, dangerous, and in some ways unpredictable as a character. It's our aim as artists to attempt to ground his design into a realistic and believable mythology without losing what is extraordinary about him."

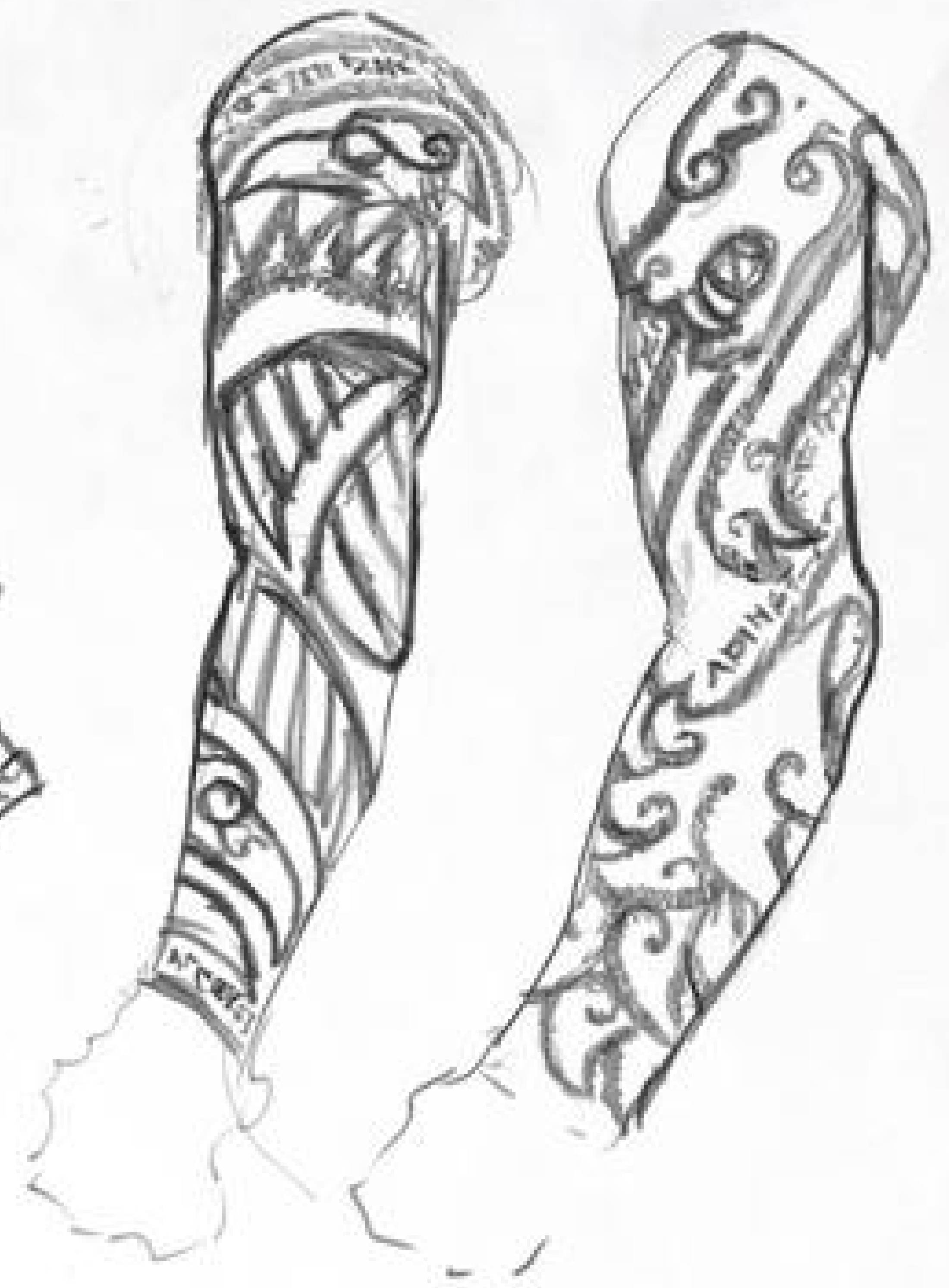


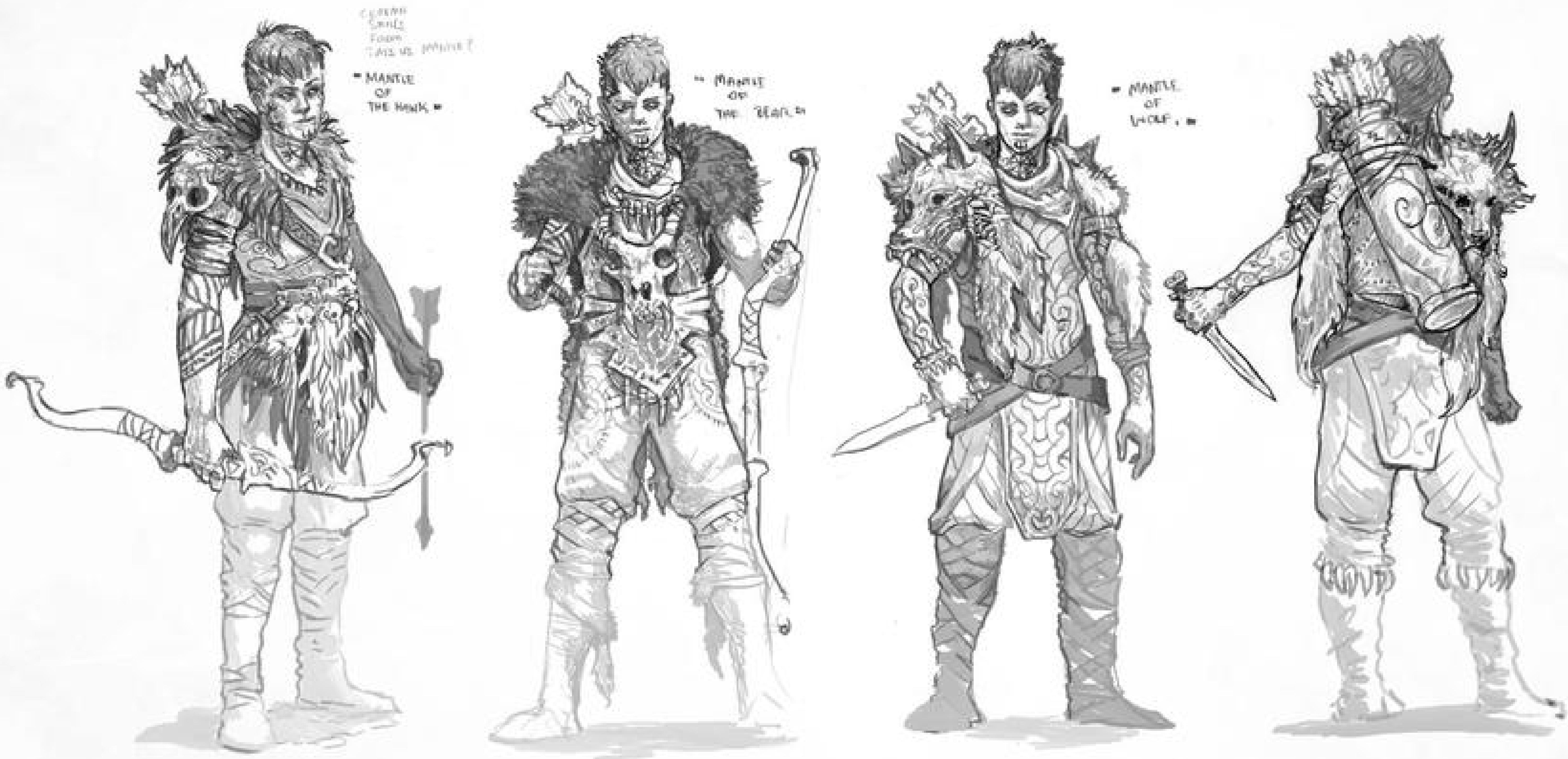
ATREUS

"The evolution of Atreus is one of the most exciting aspects of the franchise. His growing up, building things himself, and surviving this world are some things we tried to reflect in his costume and how he is building things," Grassetti said. The artists emphasized functionality over design for all of the characters. Here, for Atreus, the crossed straps on his chest and his father's Spartan cloth are elements they wanted to preserve, along with the yellow scarf that represents his giant heritage, an important continuing theme for Atreus and the game.

Artist: Stephen Oakley






CLOTH SKULLS FORM TAIL VS. MANTLE?
- MANTLE OF THE HAWK -
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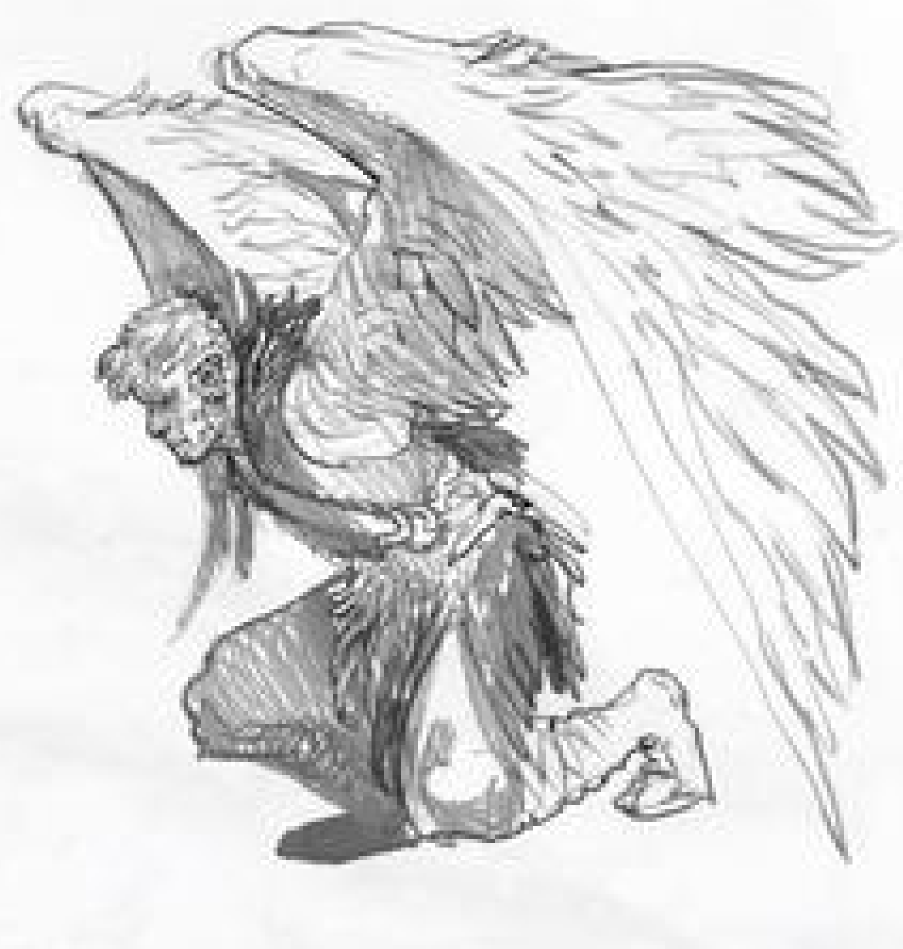
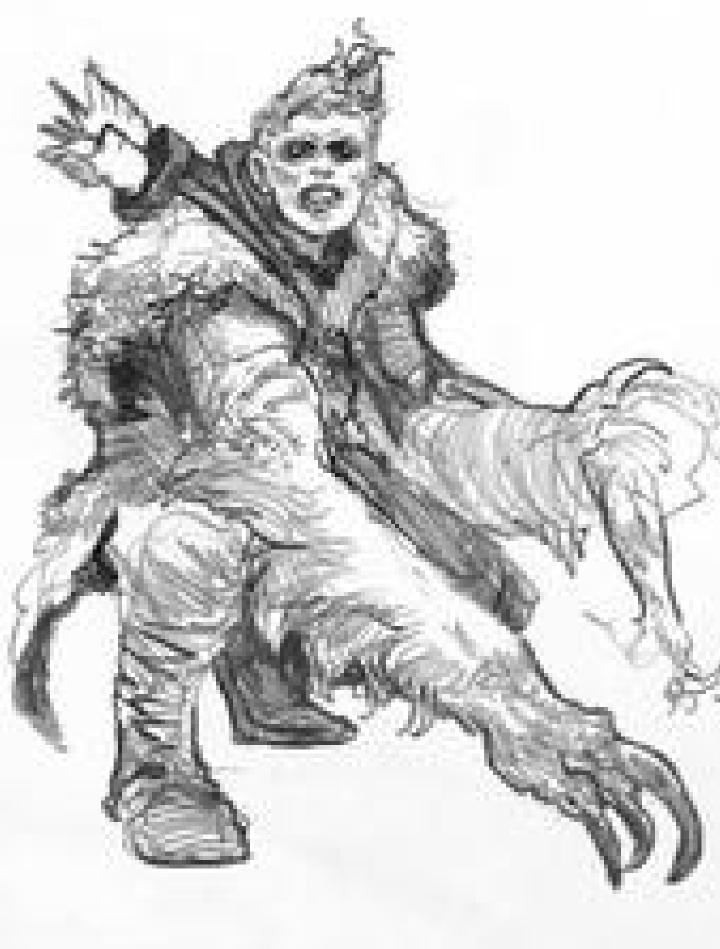
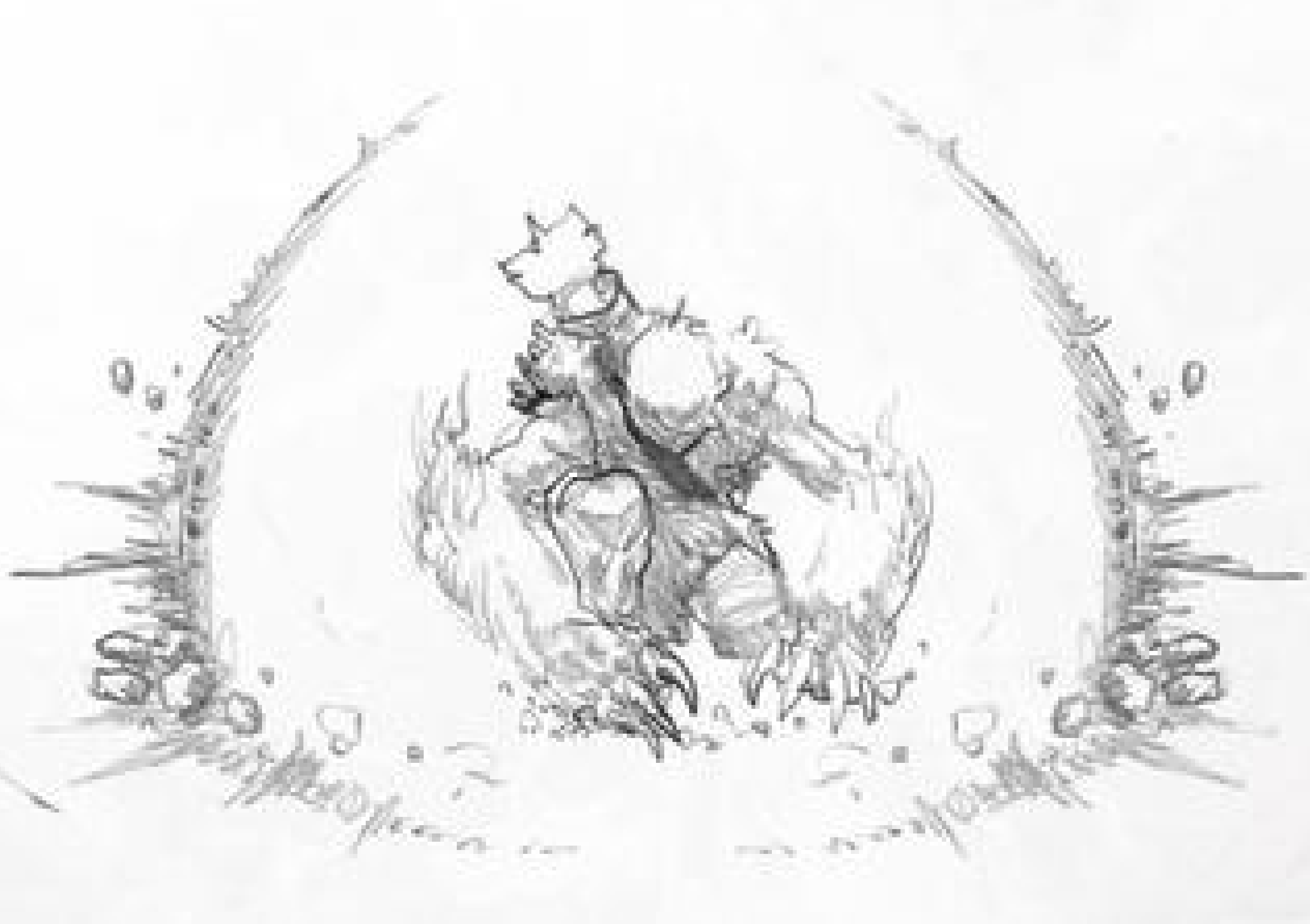
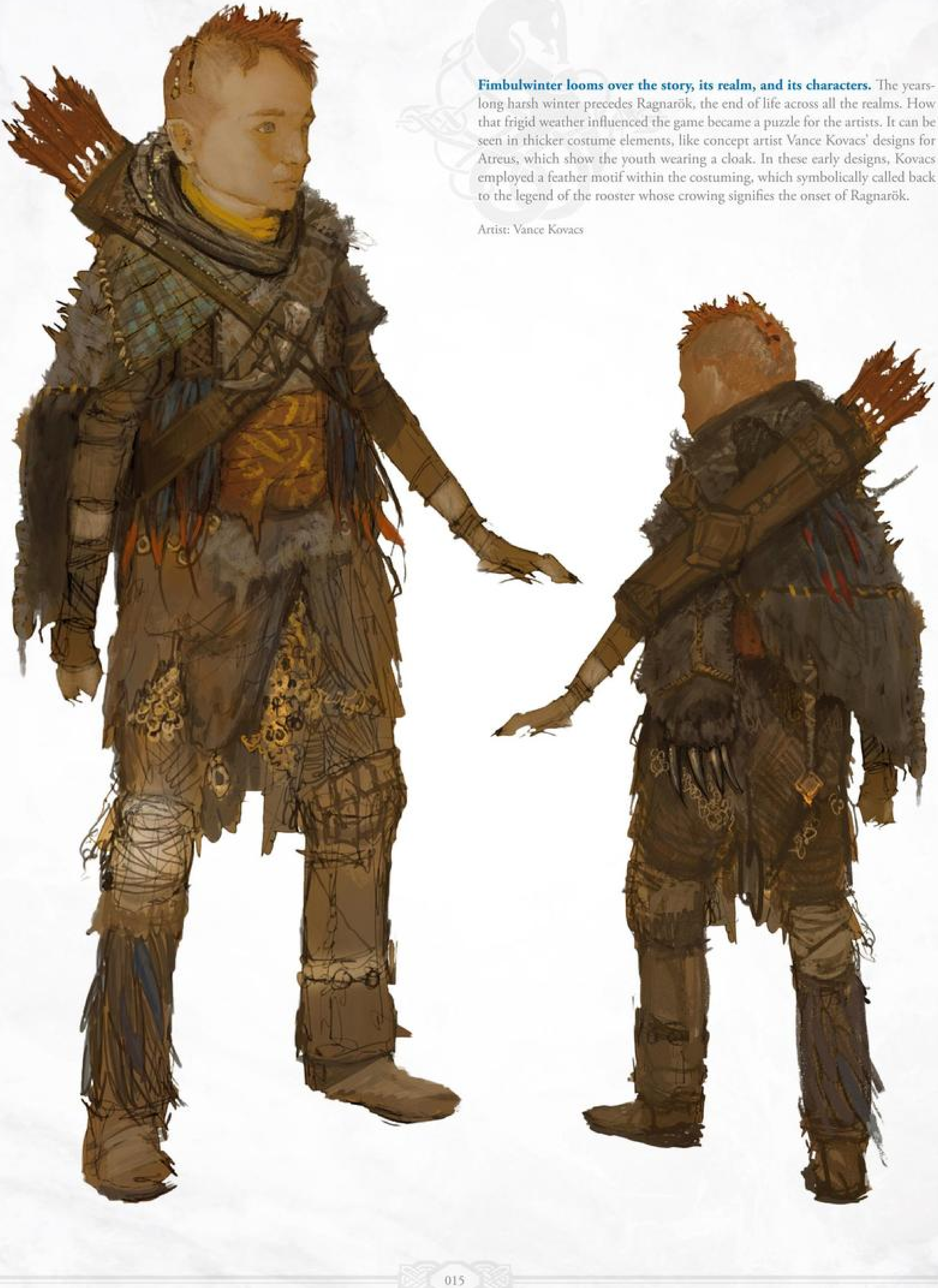
- MANTLE OF WOLF. -









Fimbulwinter looms over the story, its realm, and its characters. The years-long harsh winter precedes Ragnarök, the end of life across all the realms. How that frigid weather influenced the game became a puzzle for the artists. It can be seen in thicker costume elements, like concept artist Vance Kovacs' designs for Atreus, which show the youth wearing a cloak. In these early designs, Kovacs employed a feather motif within the costuming, which symbolically called back to the legend of the rooster whose crowing signifies the onset of Ragnarök.

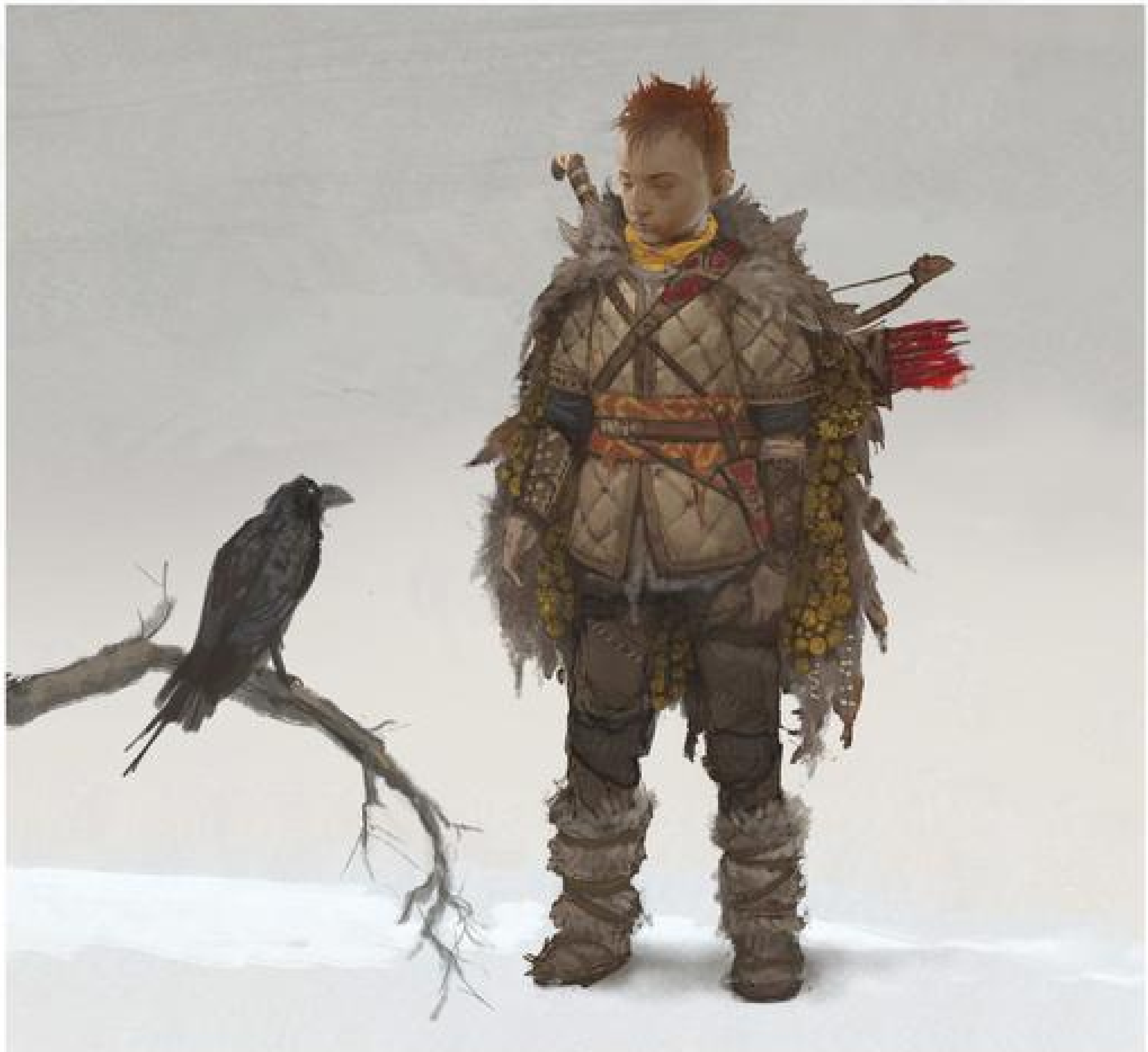
Artist: Vance Kovacs

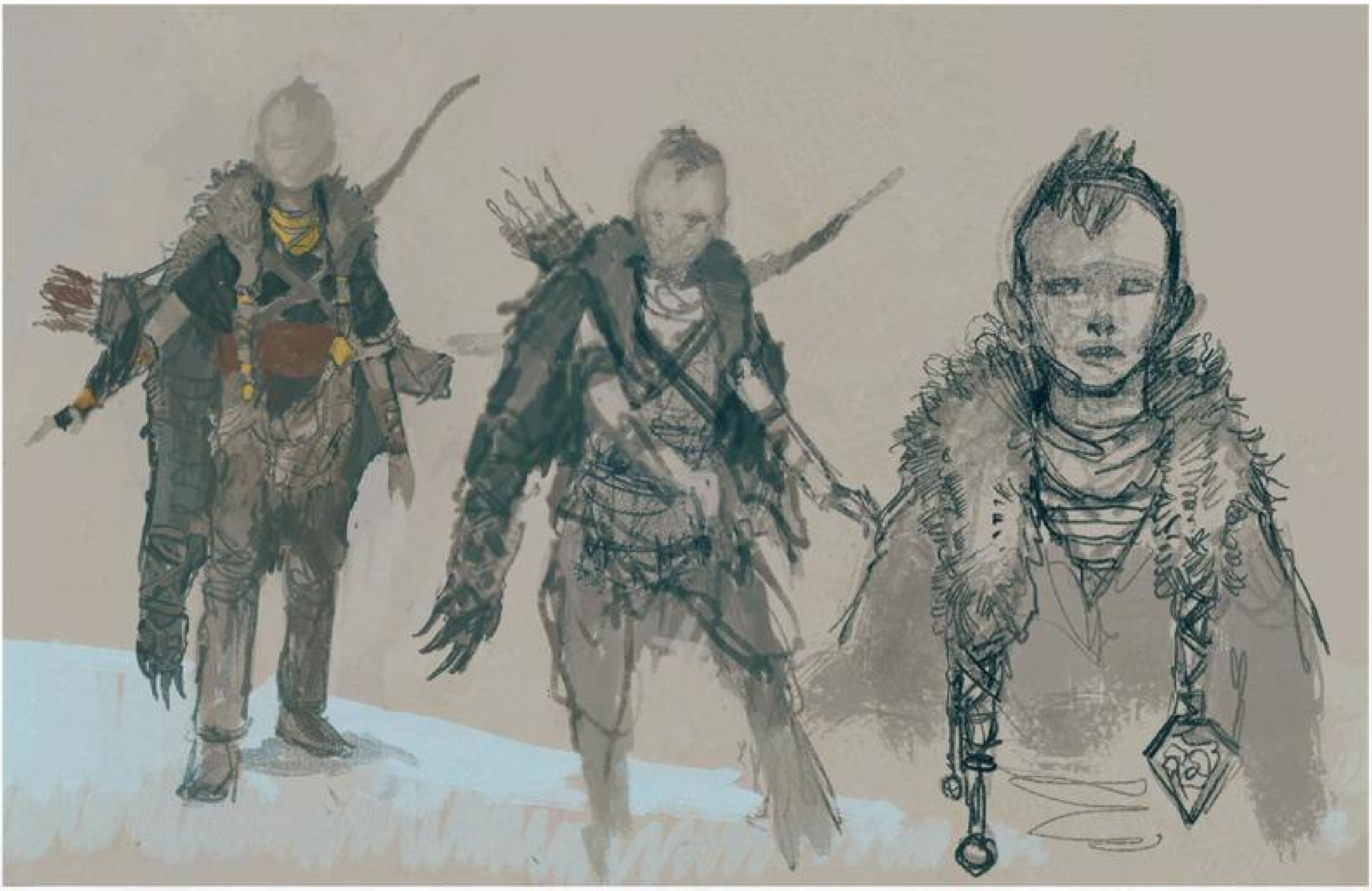
Three years have passed in the story since we last saw Atreus.

He's grown much in that time after putting his mother to rest and adventuring with Kratos. Now a teenager, Atreus is confronting the revelations about his identity and background from *God of War*.

The team wanted to represent Atreus' growth both inside and outside with this design. They built upon the visual themes established in the first game with his connection to his mother and the giants. Atreus' relationship with his parents is a defining part of his character, and the artists took care to include that in his costume.

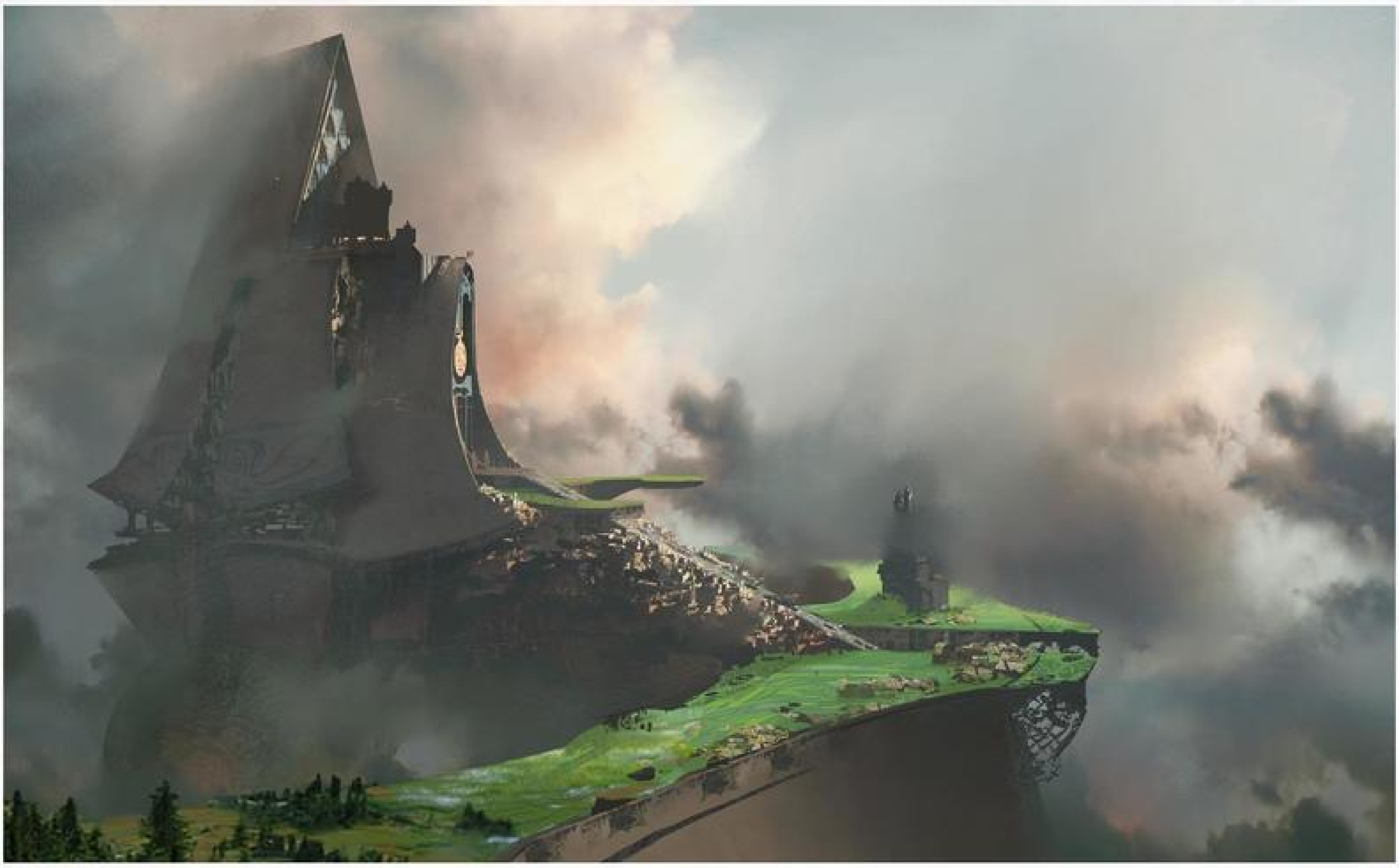
Atreus in a feathered cloak.

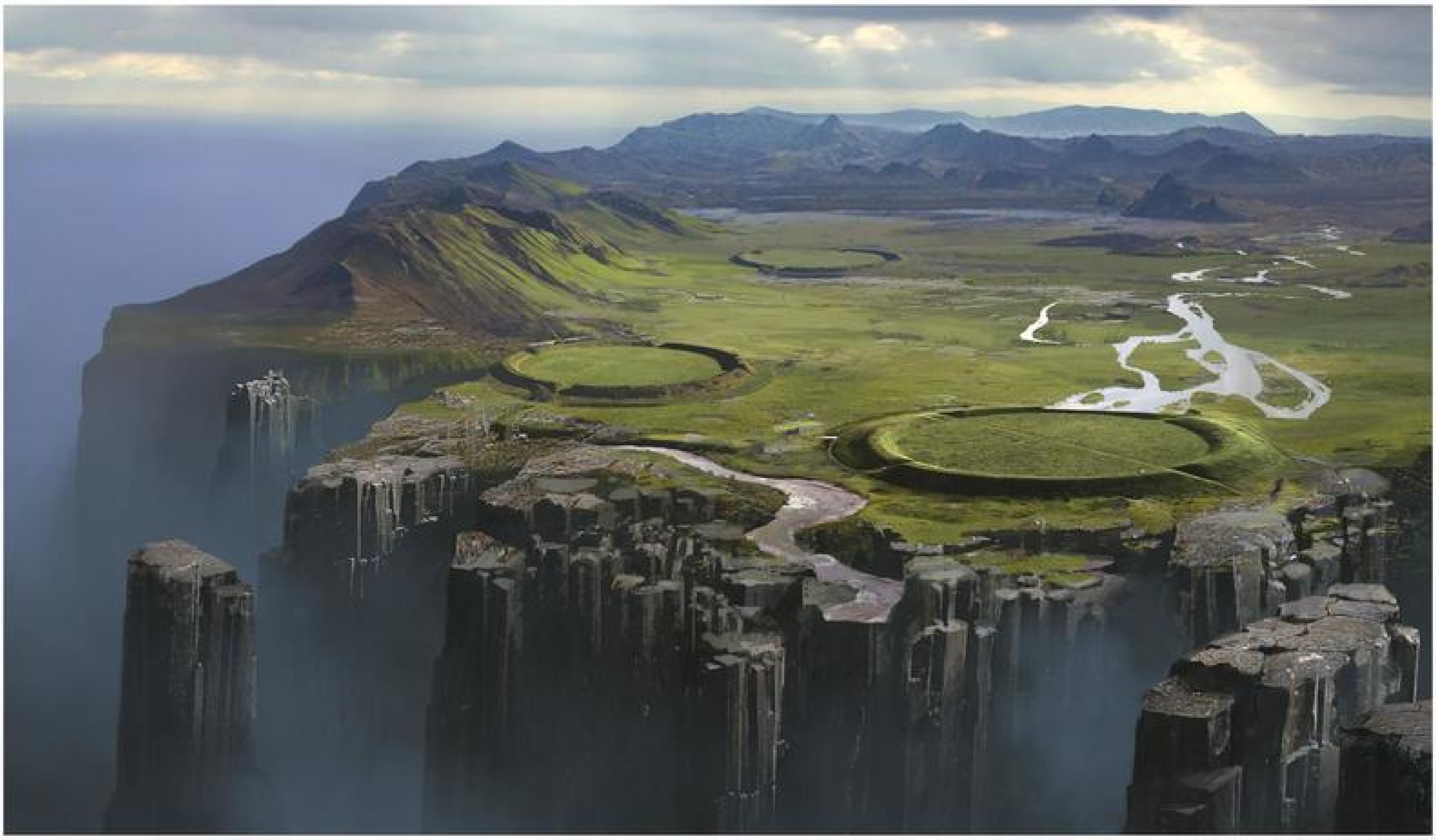




Atreus costume variations. Artists: Vance Kovacs (top and bottom); Dela Longfish (opposite)

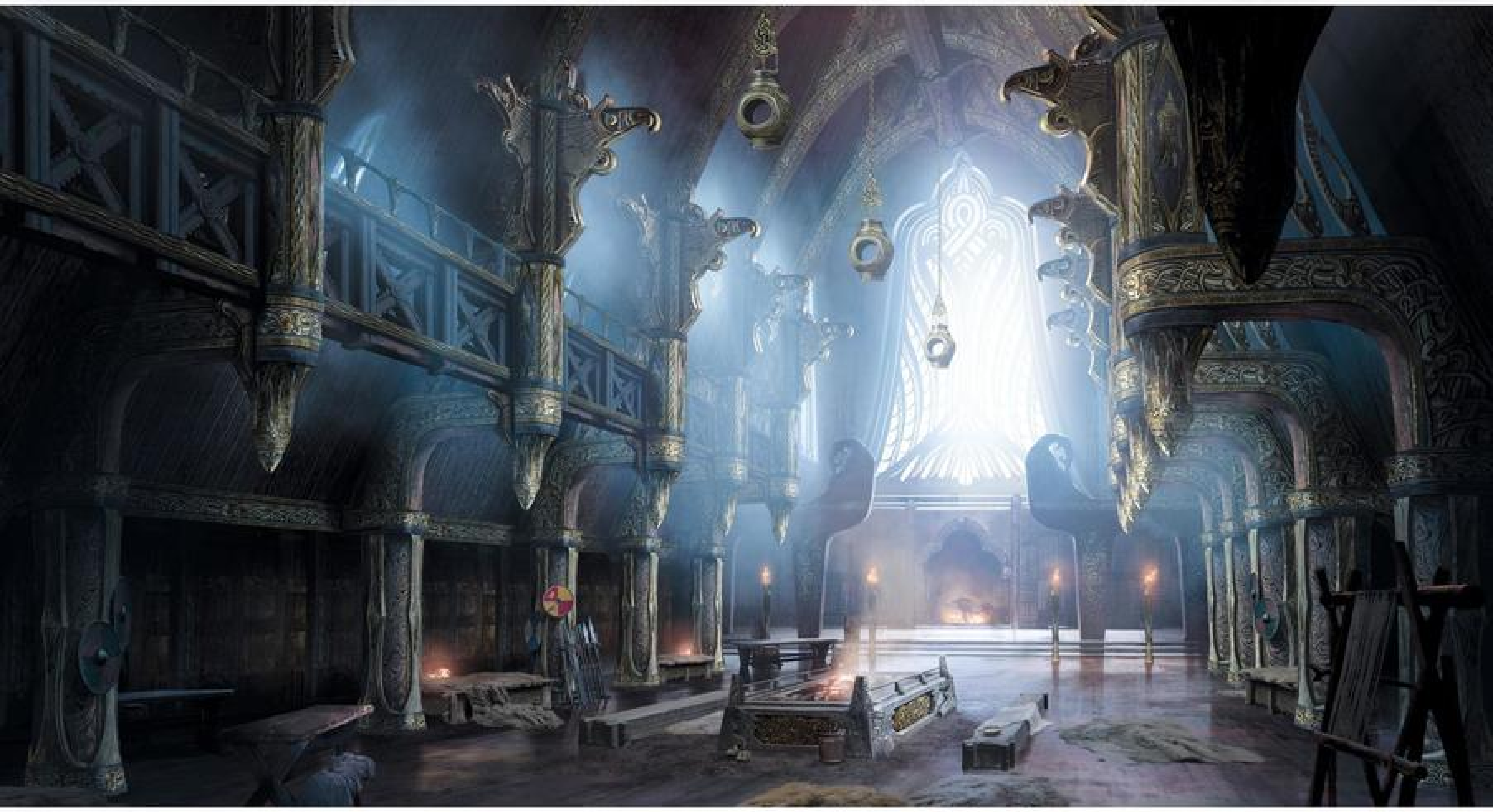
Explorations for Asgard's landscapes. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)

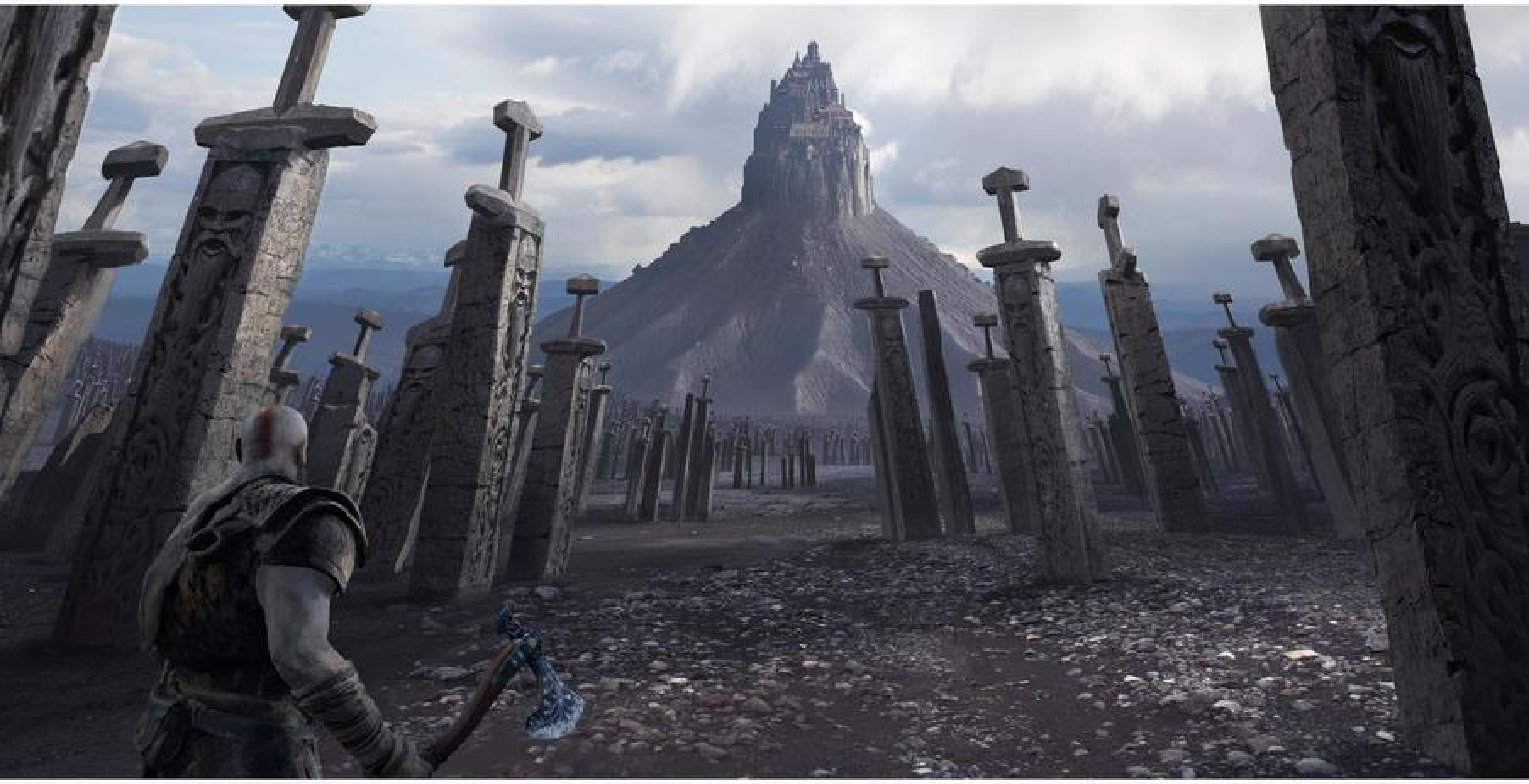




From the beginning, director Eric Williams communicated to the team that not only would *Ragnarök* visit Asgard but the realm would play a large role in the game. The environment artists struggled to find the look for Asgard while determining how grounded they would try to make it. They completed a couple of dozen paintings and drawings of the space before one of them finally resonated with the group.

Halls of Asgard explorations. Artist: Mark Castanon





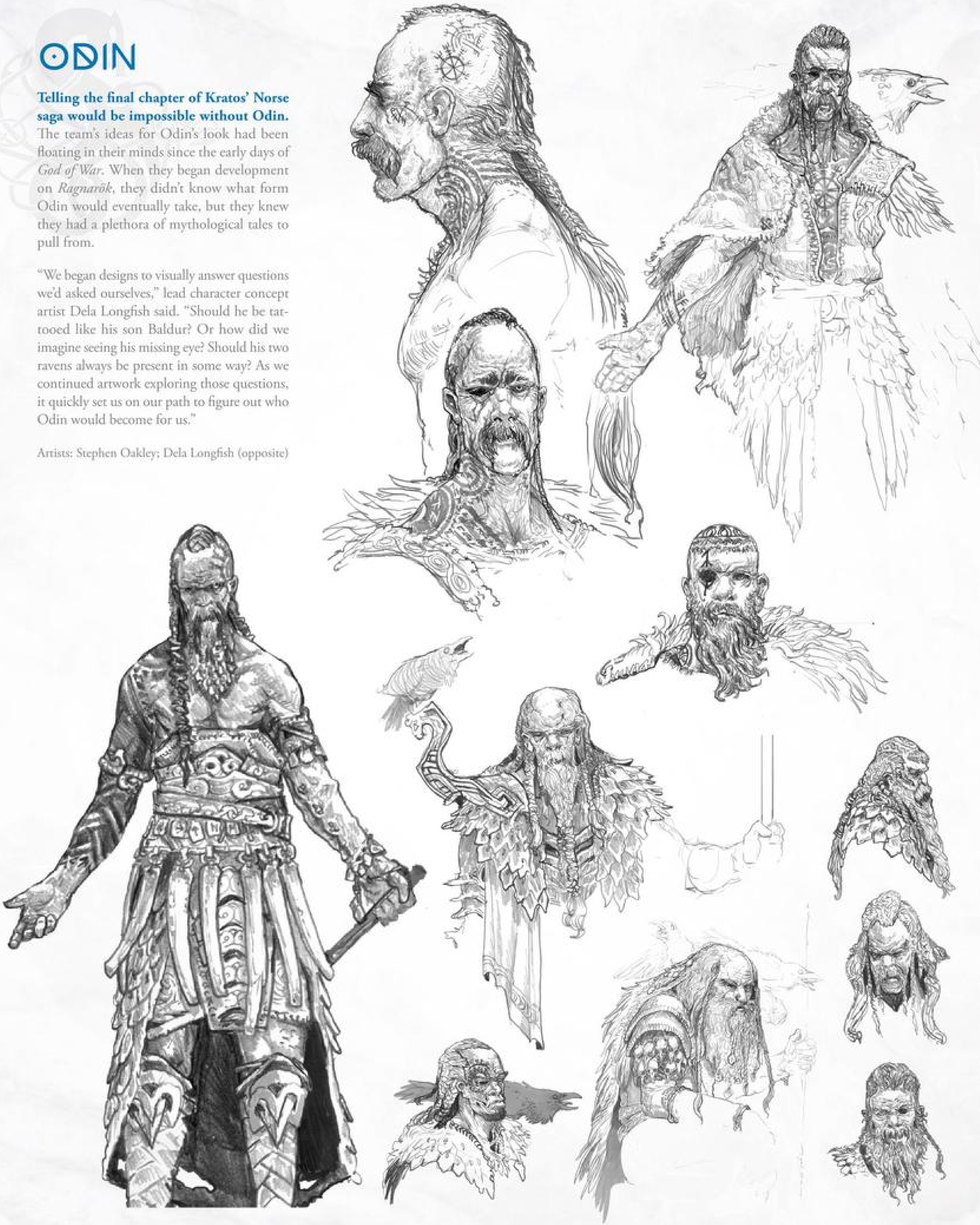
Ultimately, this is the realm where the artists leaned hardest into the classical Viking aesthetics. They didn't want a straightforward rendition of that style of architecture though. The artists preserved elements of historical realism while also making them more fanciful, as well as tying them to an ever-present raven motif that speaks to Odin's presence.

ODIN

Telling the final chapter of Kratos' Norse saga would be impossible without Odin. The team's ideas for Odin's look had been floating in their minds since the early days of *God of War*. When they began development on *Ragnarök*, they didn't know what form Odin would eventually take, but they knew they had a plethora of mythological tales to pull from.

"We began designs to visually answer questions we'd asked ourselves," lead character concept artist Dela Longfish said. "Should he be tattooed like his son Baldur? Or how did we imagine seeing his missing eye? Should his two ravens always be present in some way? As we continued artwork exploring those questions, it quickly set us on our path to figure out who Odin would become for us."

Artists: Stephen Oakley; Dela Longfish (opposite)

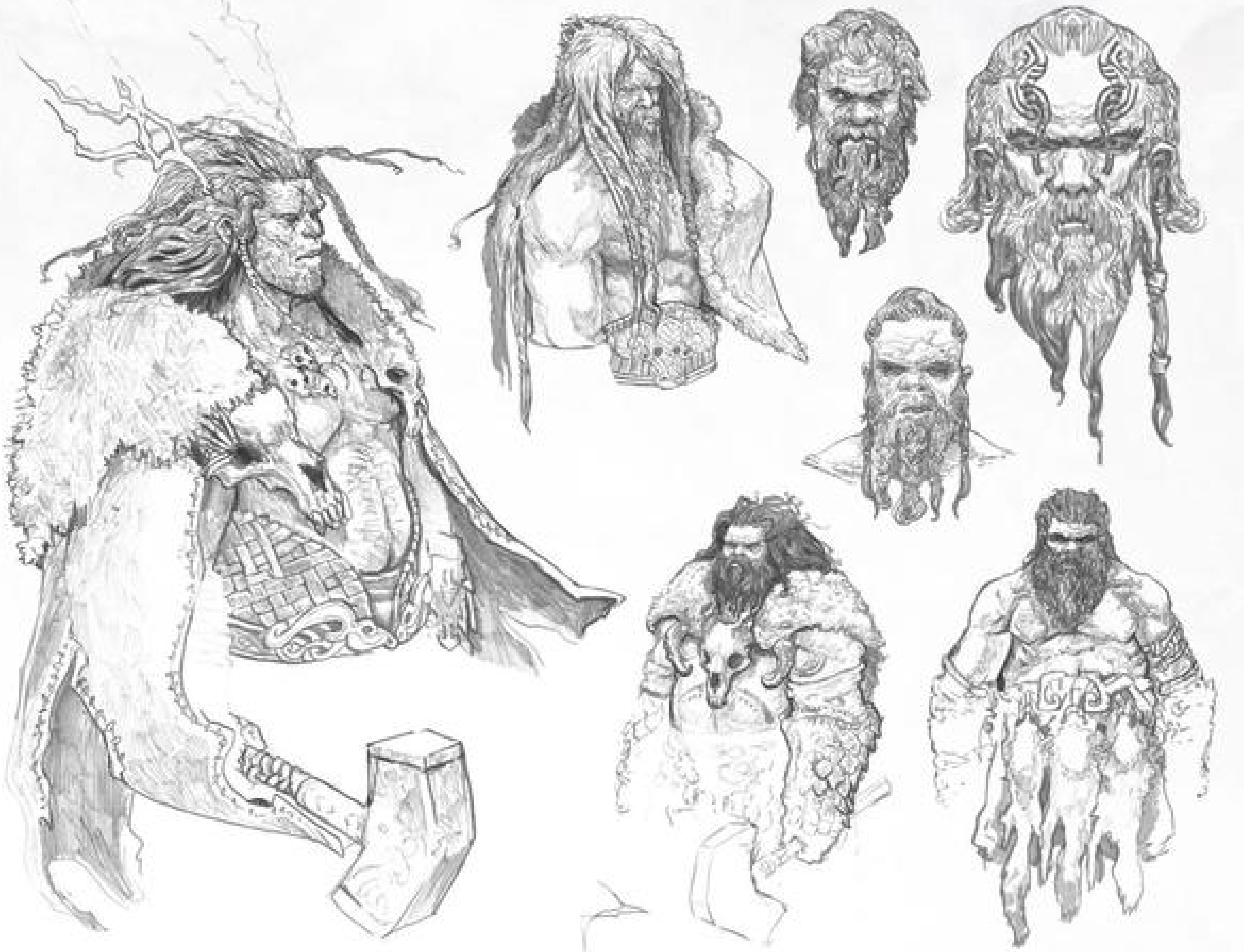


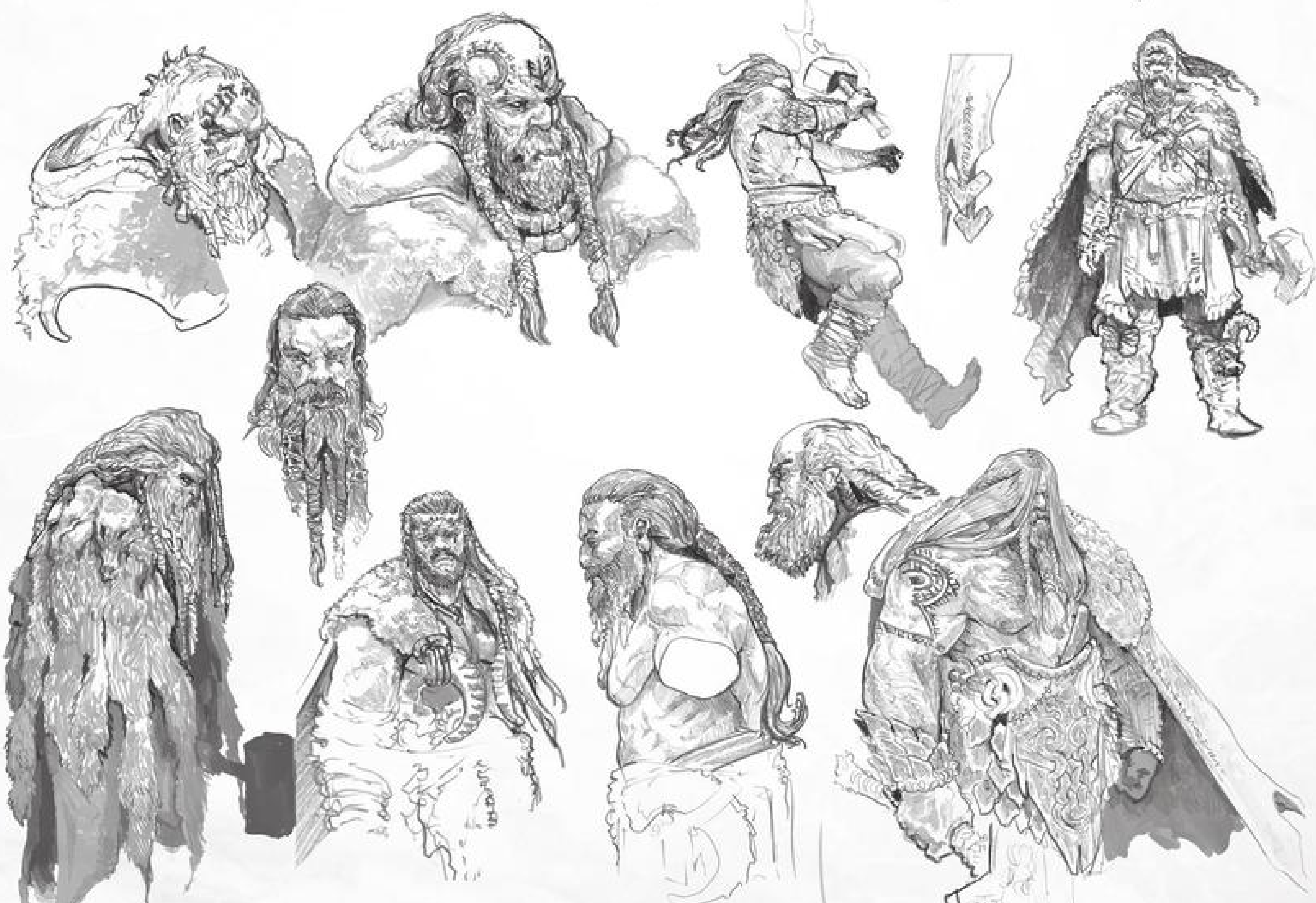
THOR

The team didn't have specifics about Thor's role in *Ragnarök* at this point of development, but they knew he would feature prominently in the game. They wanted to give him an imposing, thunderous look. In early discussions, they put forth the idea of giving Thor an image of unpredictability to match his personality.

Longfish recalled, "Back at the start of the game we had some visitors from the Netherlands at the studio. They had mentioned if we have Thor in the next game, could we make sure his hair is red, since that was how he was described in their legends? This is something we kept in mind, and it would make it into the final design."

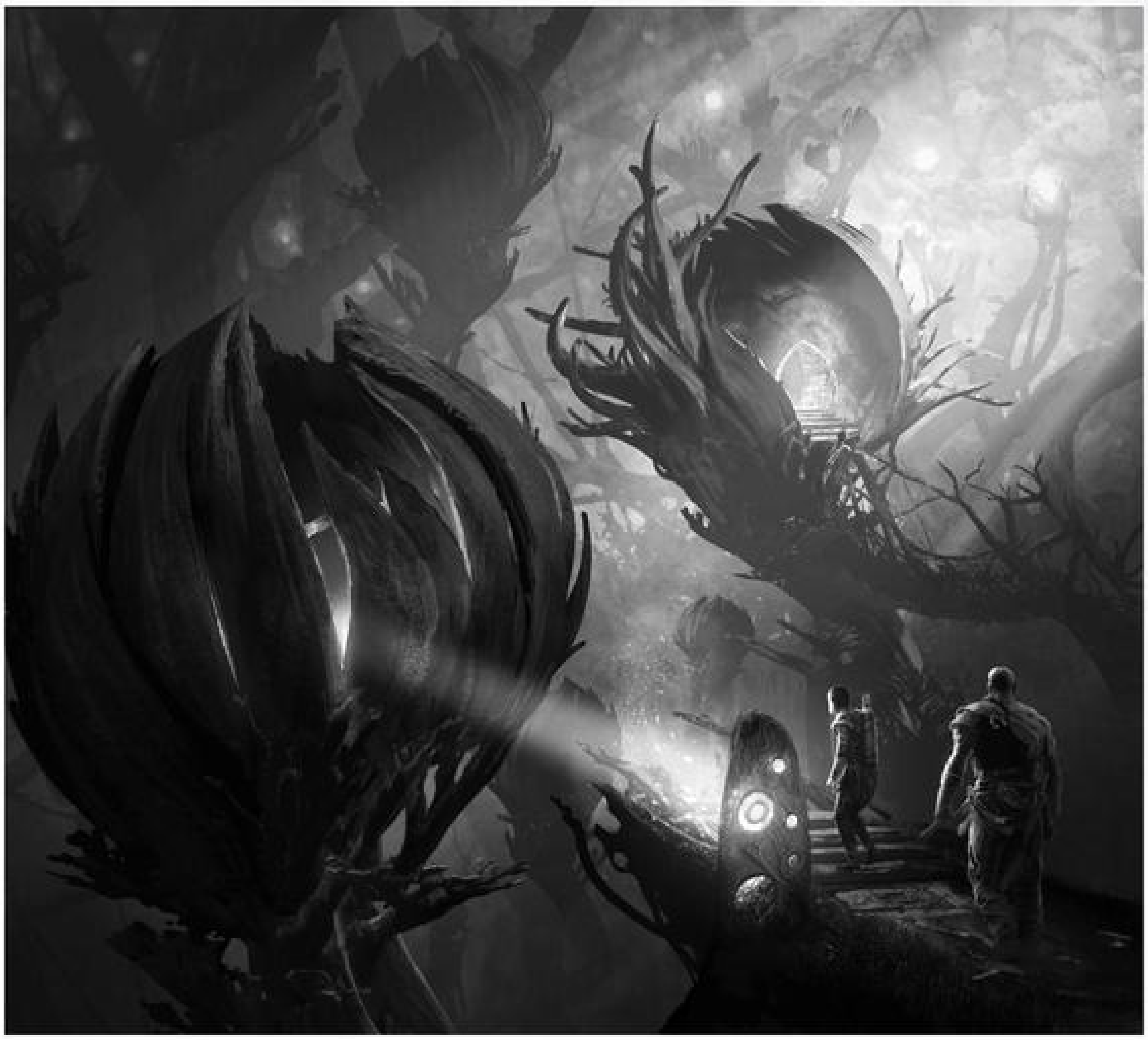
Artists: Stephen Oakley; Dela Longfish (opposite)

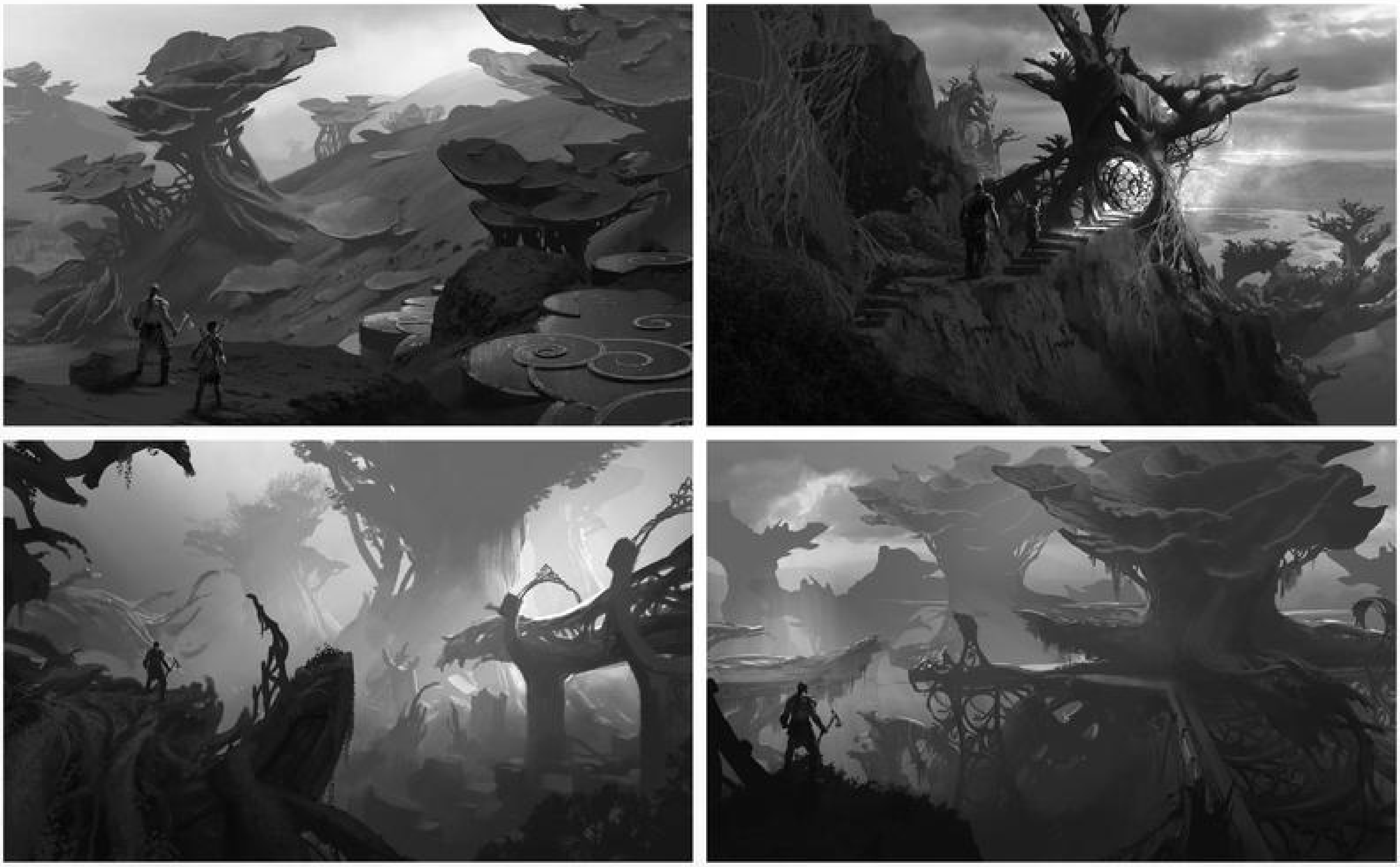




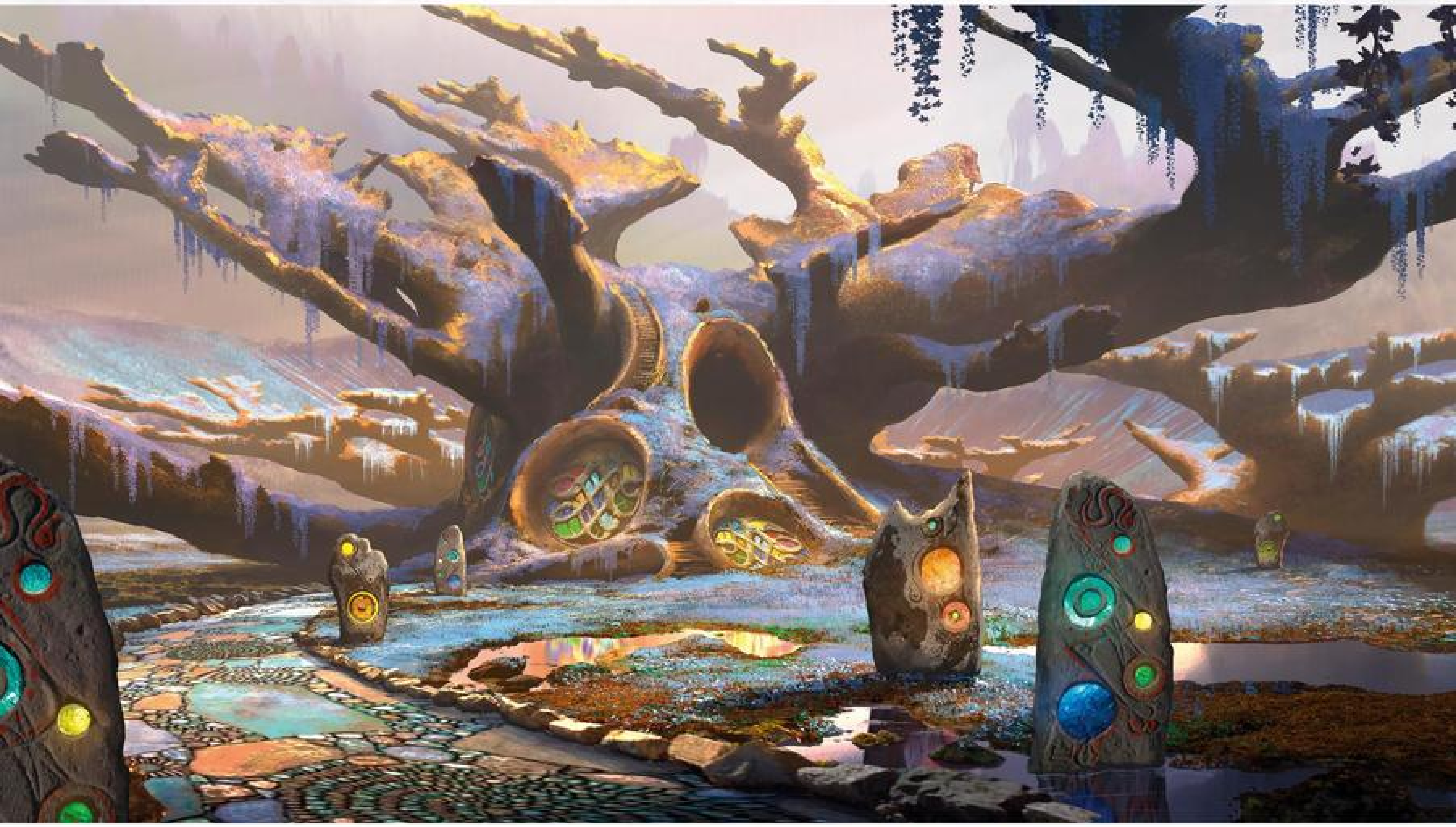
***God of War* showed a glimpse of Vanaheim from Freya's window when Kratos and Atreus knew her only as the Witch of the Woods.** While she was in Midgard, Freya lived beneath the turtle Chaurli, her home surrounded by a beautiful pocket of red trees and colorful plants. Those elements extended to Freya's home in Vanaheim.

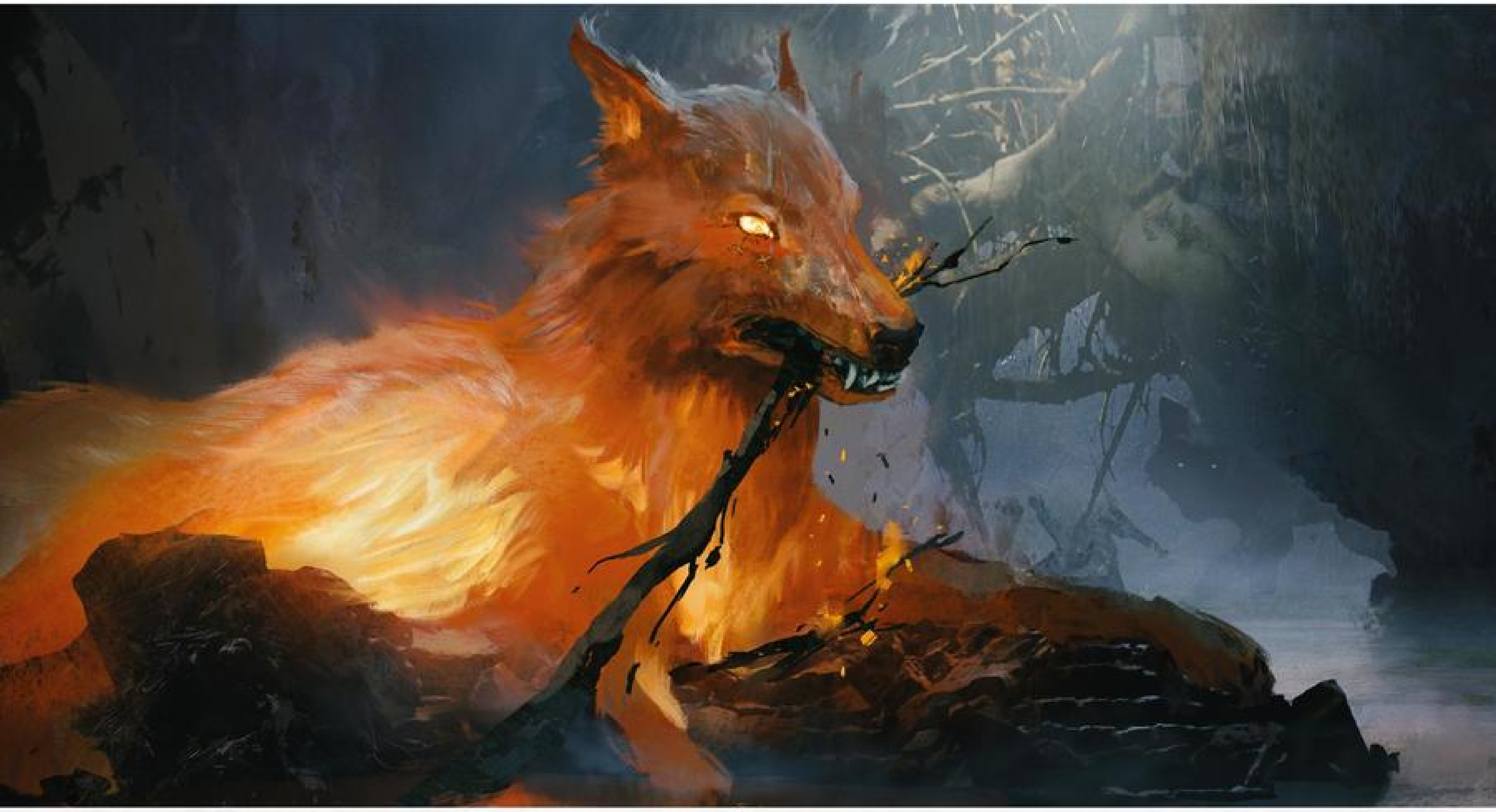
"As we started to explore her true homeland of Vanaheim, we thought about what significance that beautiful pocket could have, and how the environment could also showcase any particular nature and abilities of the Vanir gods to contrast them to the other peoples of the nine realms," senior environment concept artist Mark Castanon said. "We knew overall we wanted this realm to be lusher, and subsequently we had fun thinking about what game mechanics we could inspire centered around a unique biome of this nature."





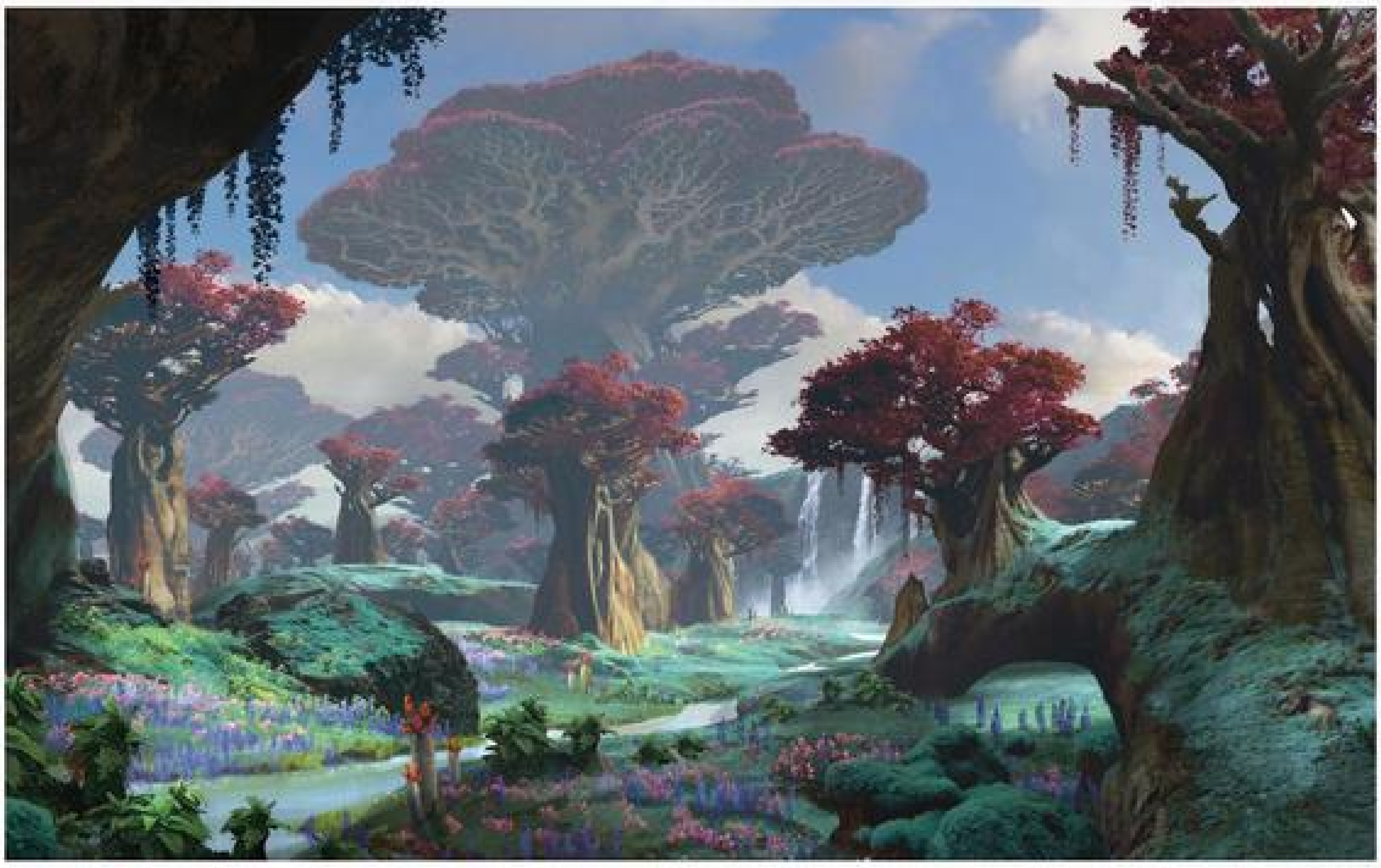
Finding Vanaheim's landscapes. Artist: Mark Castanon



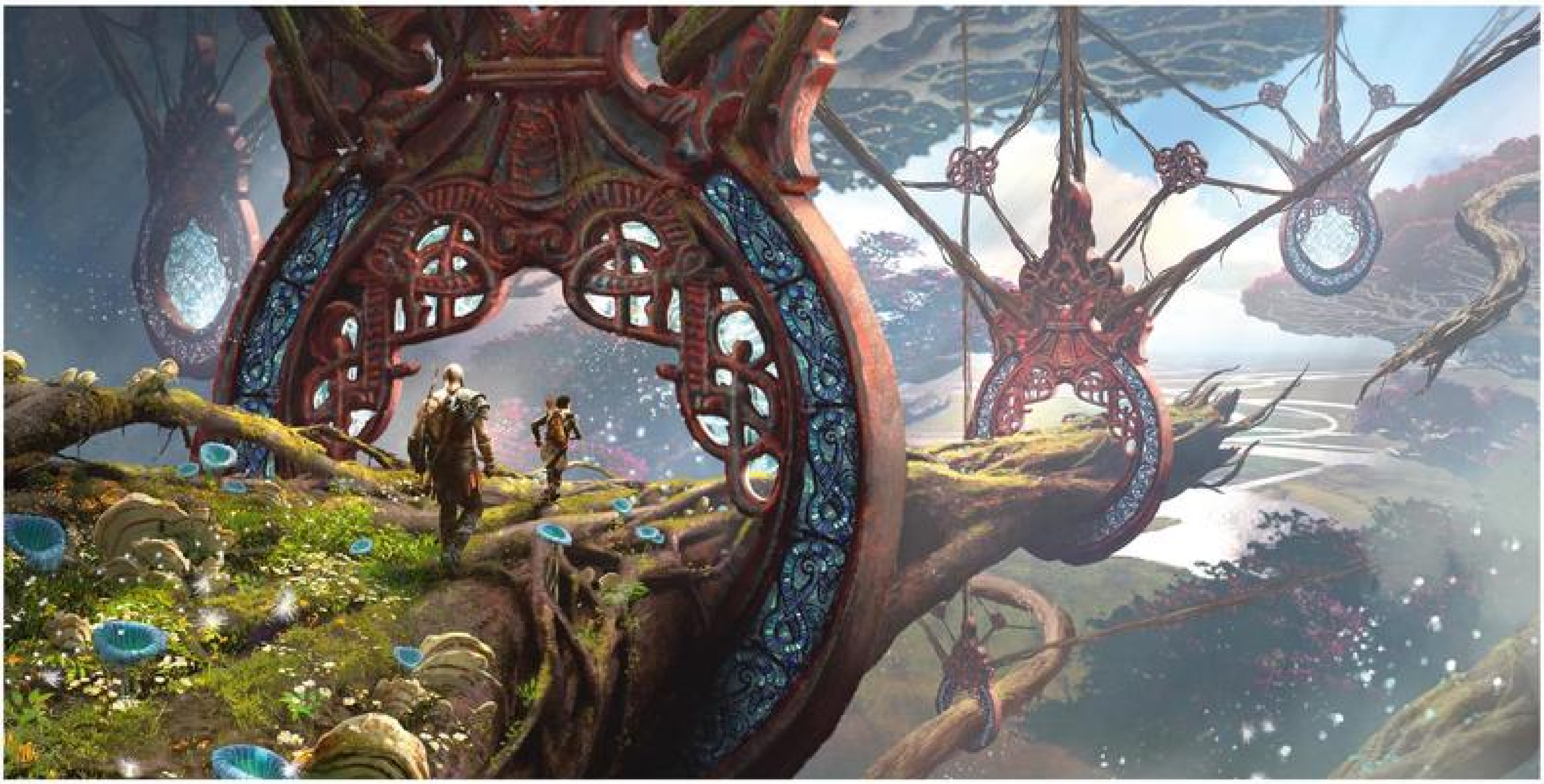


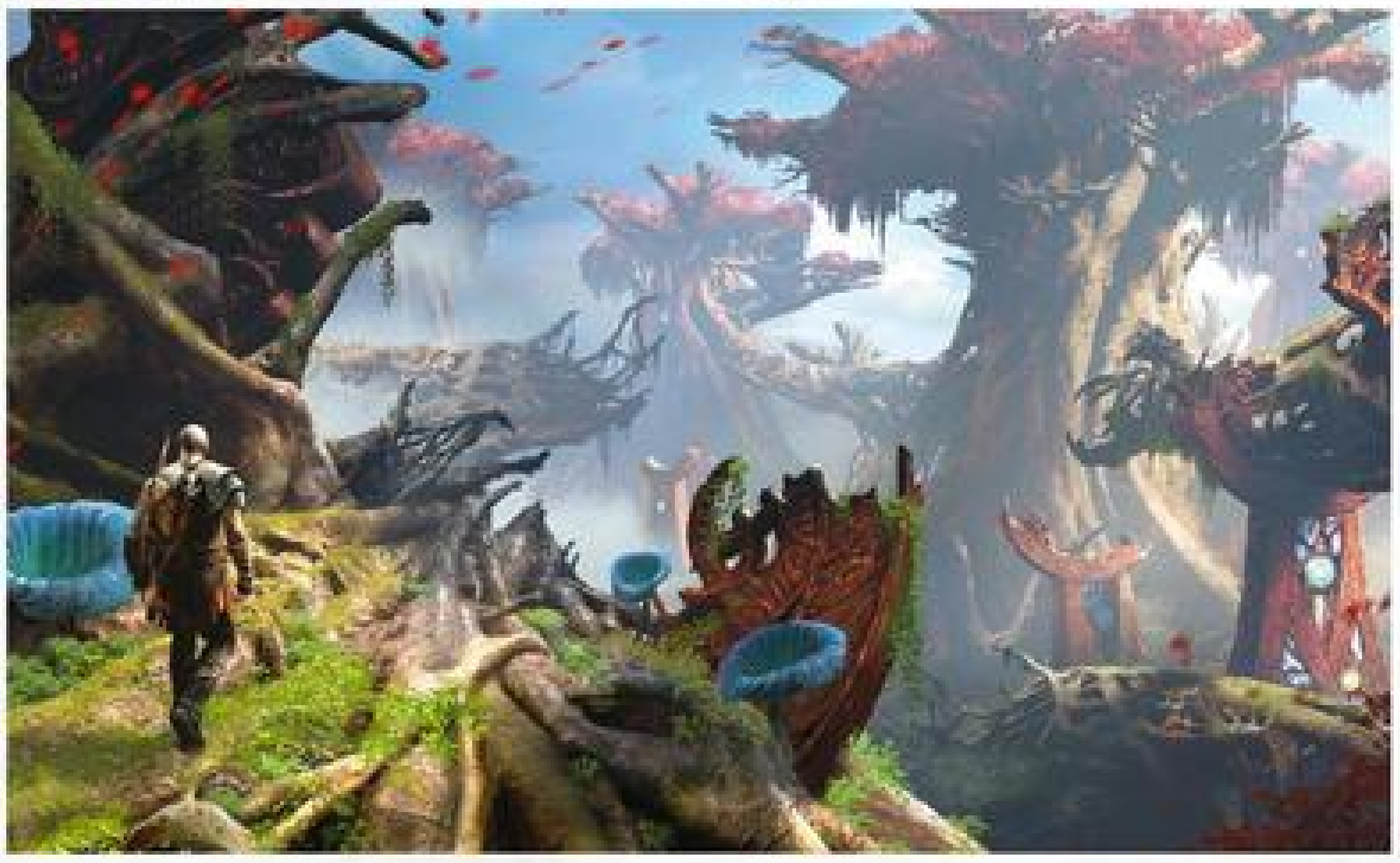
Sköll glowing like the sun. Artists: Mark Castanon (top); Luke Berliner (bottom)

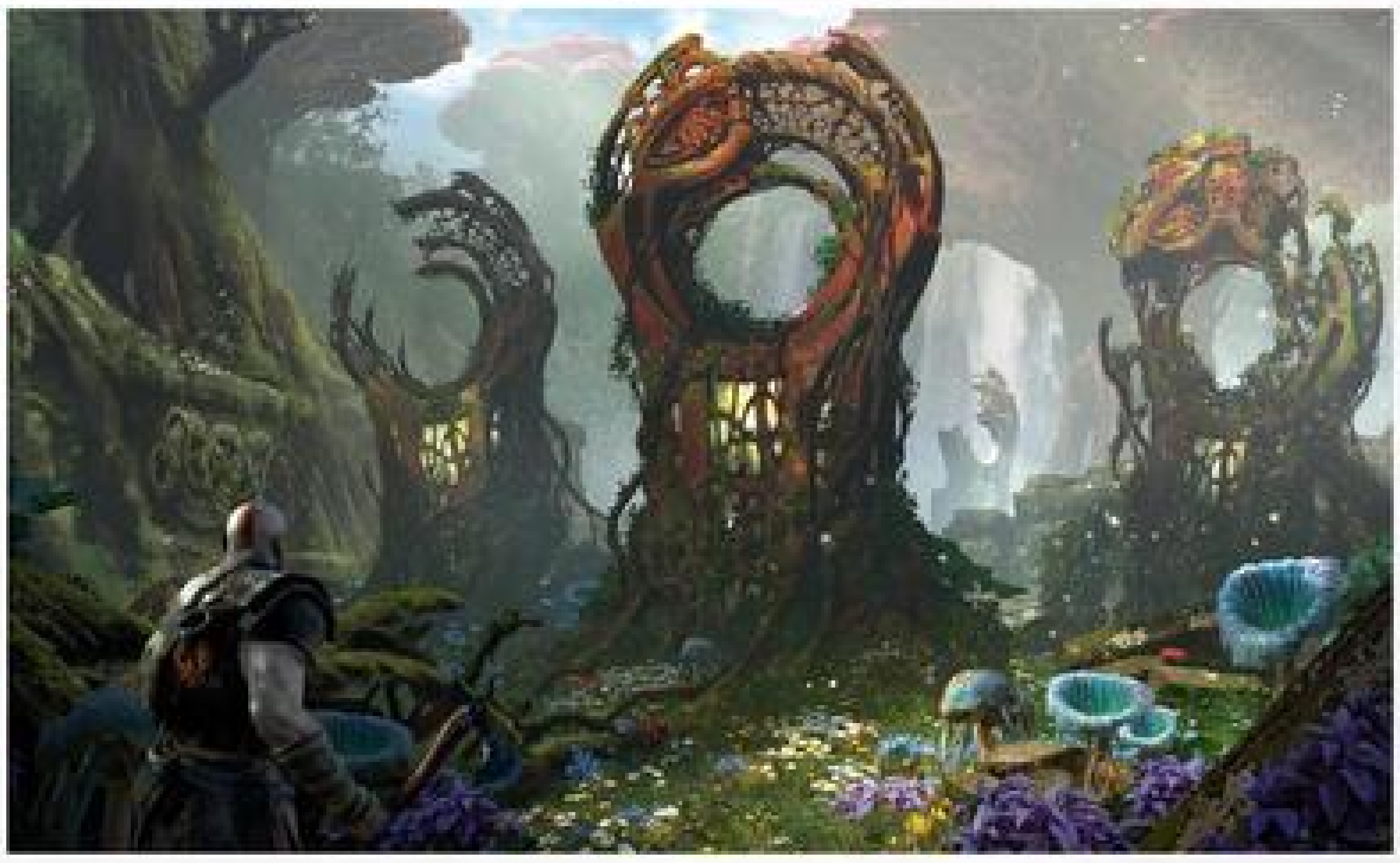
The environment concept artists pursued the idea that if the Vanir had a special relationship with the land, perhaps they would will the growth of the vegetation around them. "These concepts explored the thought of a dense jungle where the Vanir grew traversable root paths through giant suspended architectural rings as a potential way to add some elevation to the gameplay," Castanon said. "Some concepts also explored the thought of using these paths in a higher-elevation gameplay functionality inside of these massive red-leaved trees."



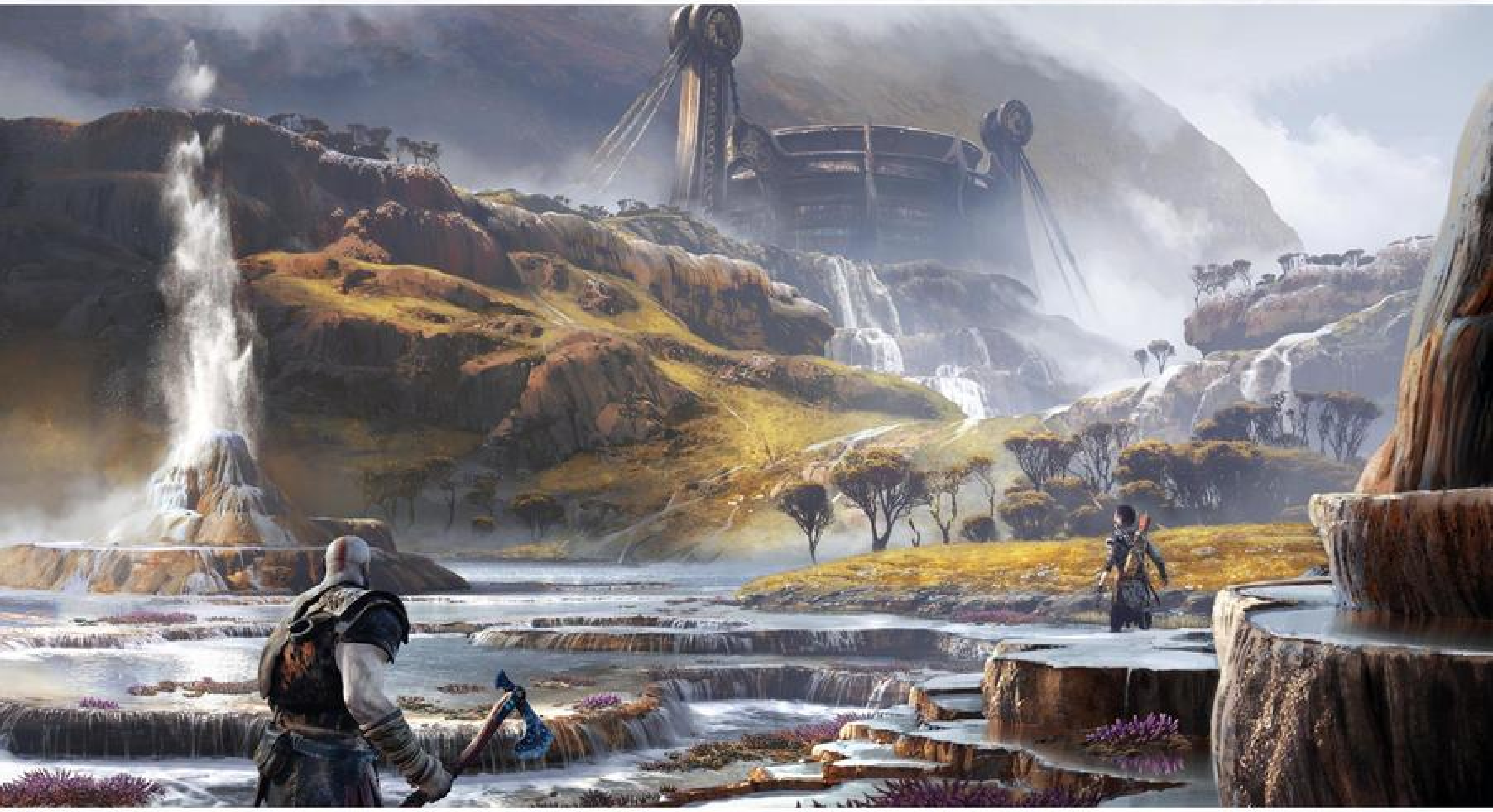
The home of the Vanir. Artist: Mark Castanon

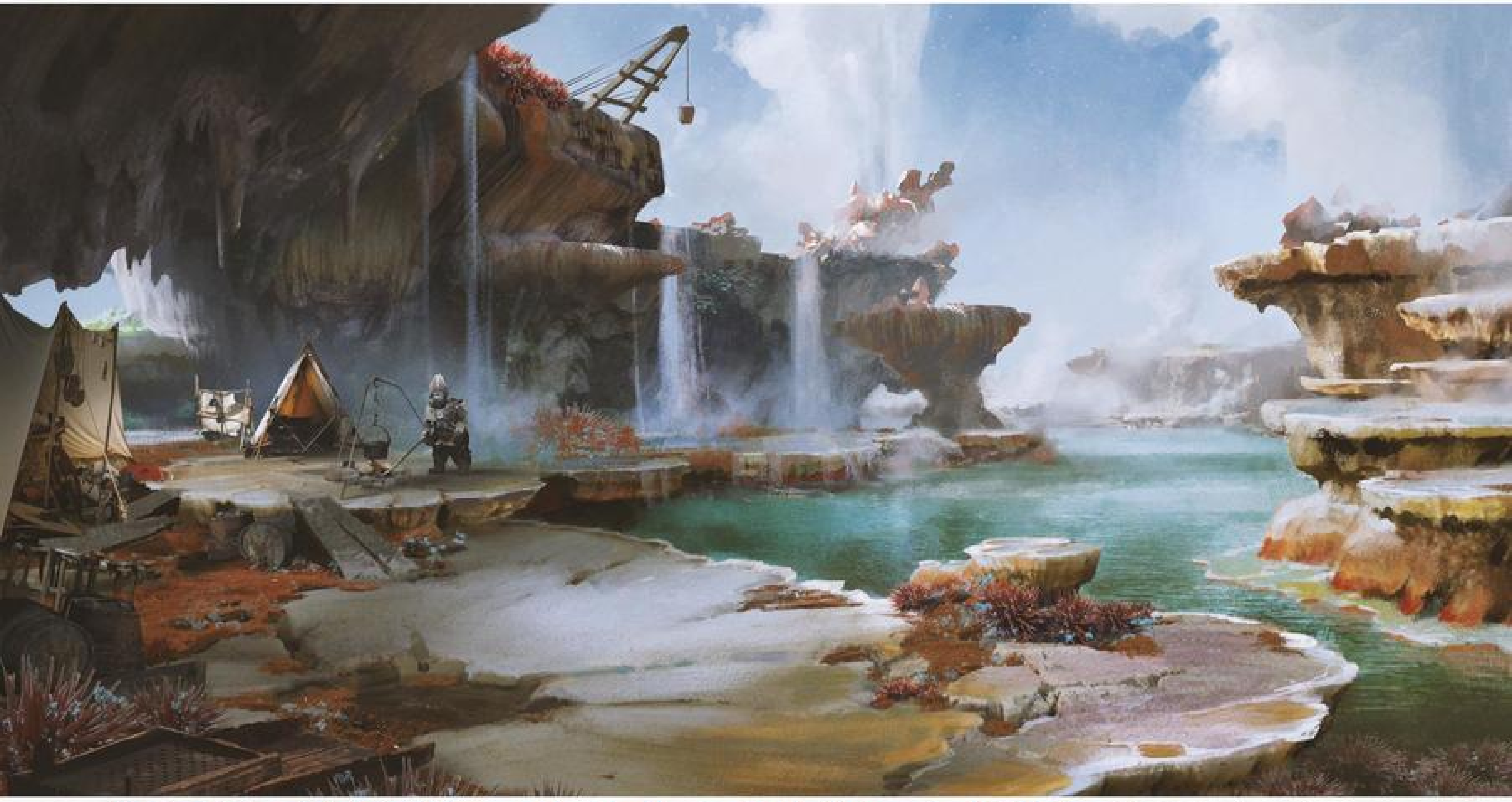




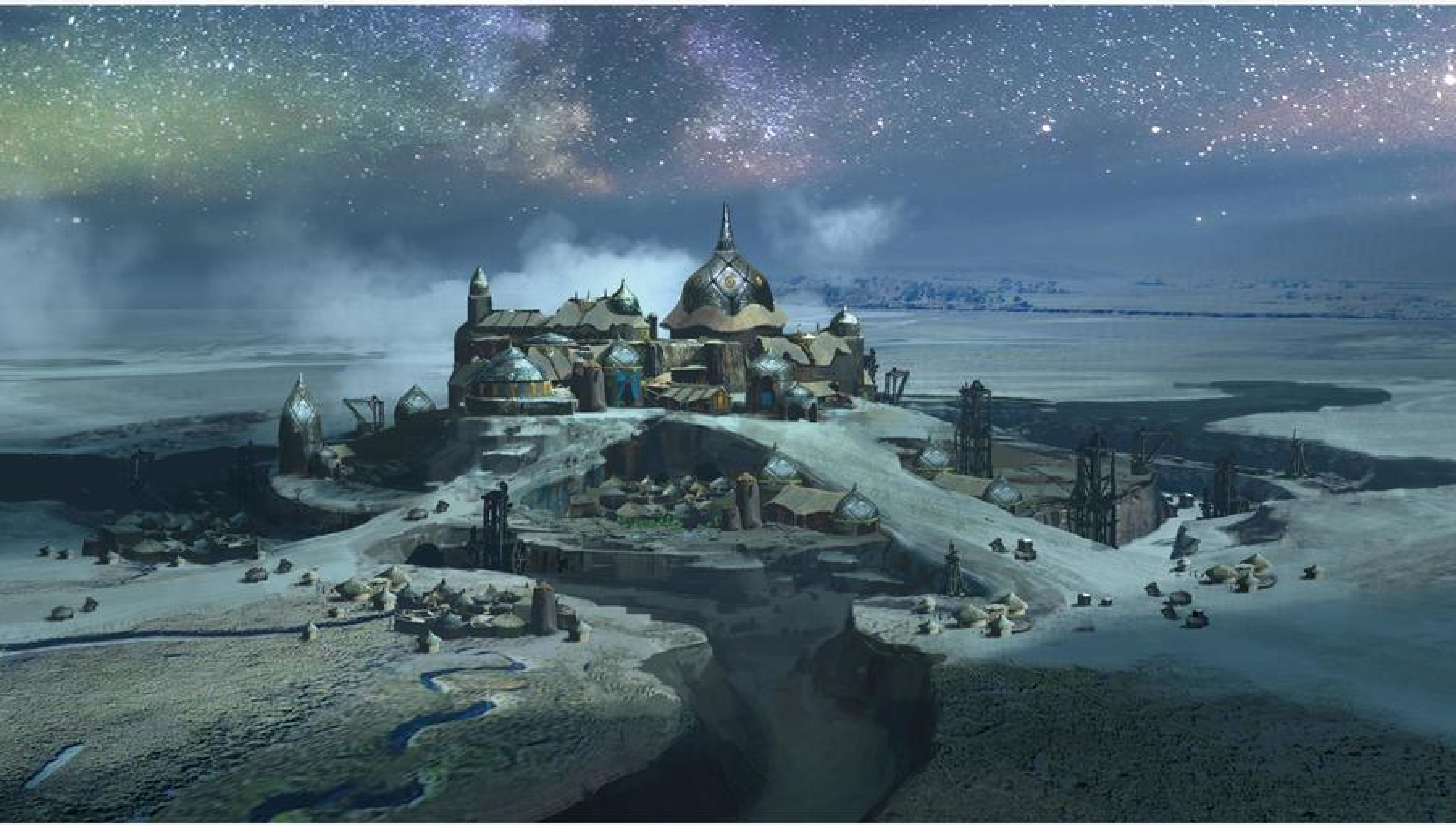


A geyser in Svartalfheim. Artists: Mark Castanon (top); Luke Berliner (bottom)



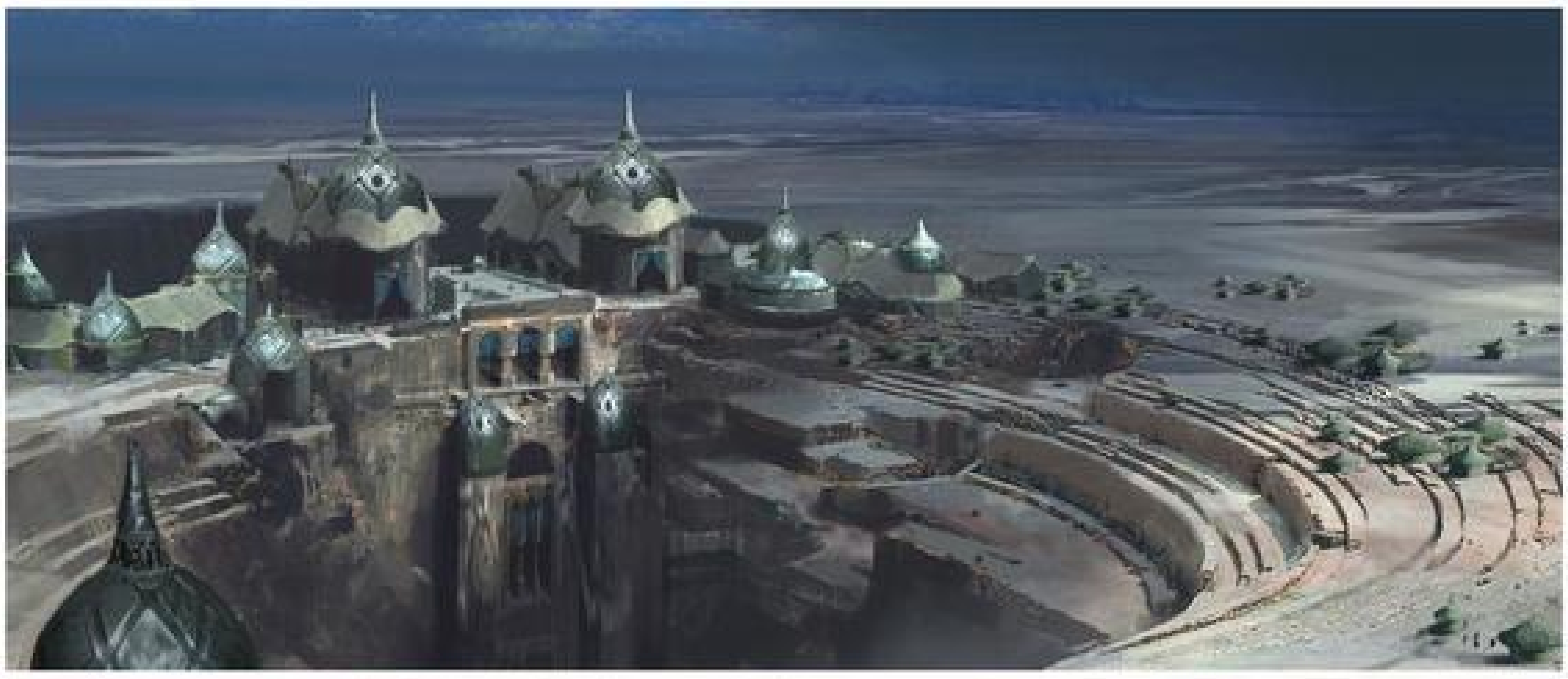


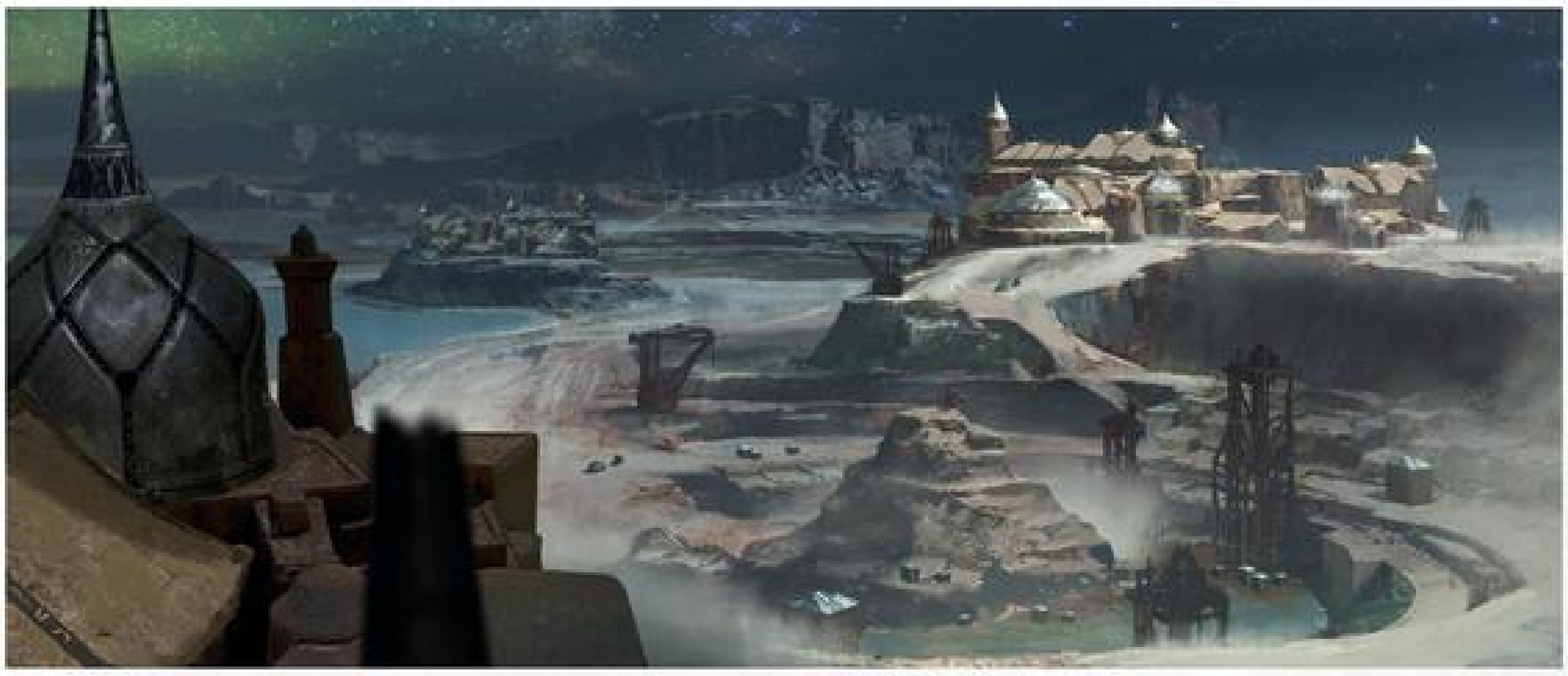
"For Svartalfheim, we looked a lot at Yellowstone and geothermal locations in Iceland for inspiration," Luke Berliner said. "Knowing how much time we were going to spend here, it became important to have bright, clear skies to give a more cheerful feeling compared to Midgard or some of the other, darker, realms."



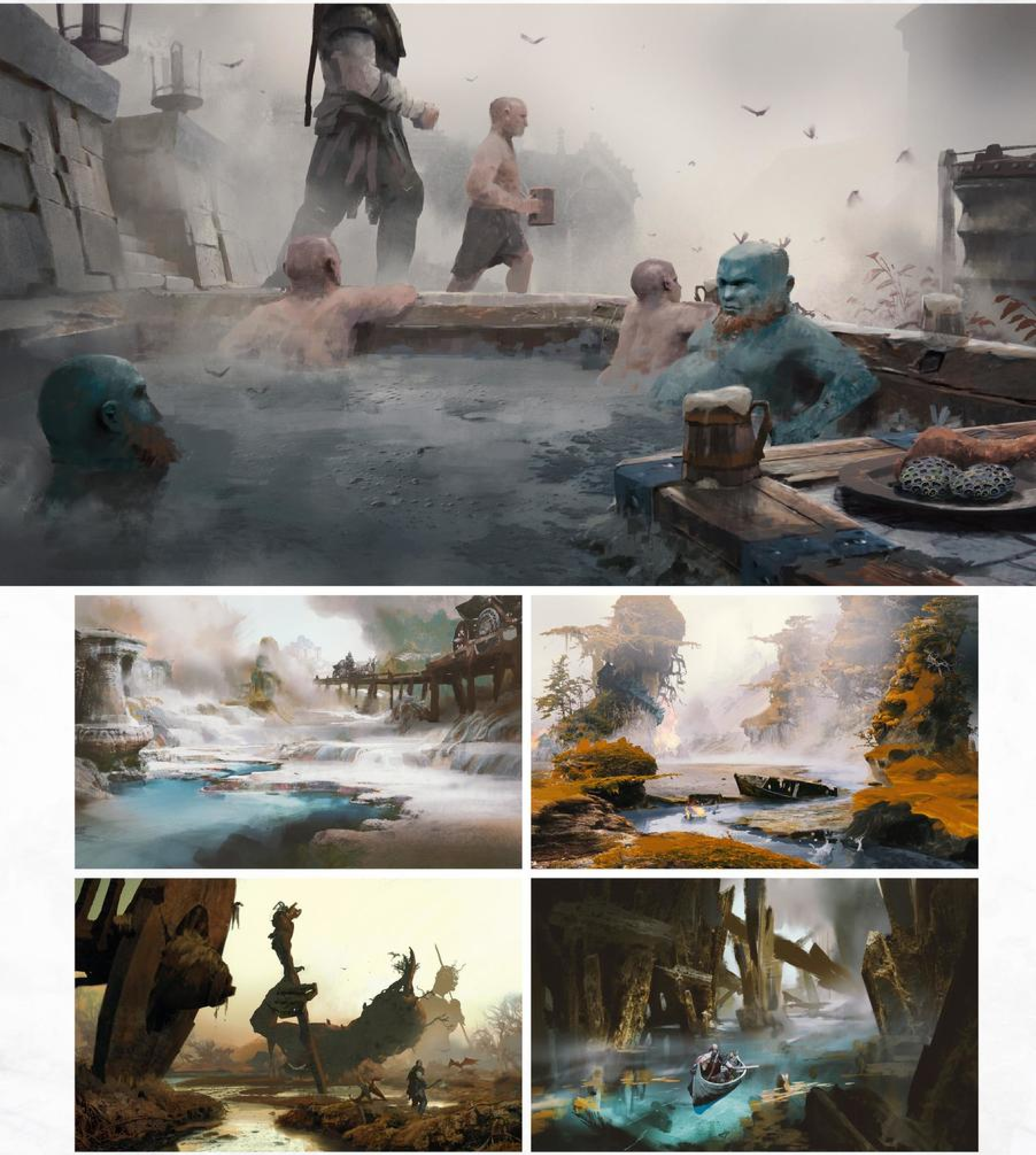
Home of the Dwarves, Svartalfheim is a place of industry. The realm teems with mining and manufacturing facilities. The artists felt it was important to include representation of those functions across the realm's landscape, so this high-vision art explores how that could work.

"A lot of these images seek to ask questions," Berliner said. "How much of the mining is mixed in with the town? What's the culture like? What tools and techniques are they using to create their architecture? What are they mining and how are they extracting it? One idea that stuck early on was having their armorsmithing influence how they construct buildings. What would it look like if you built a house the same way you would make a helmet?"



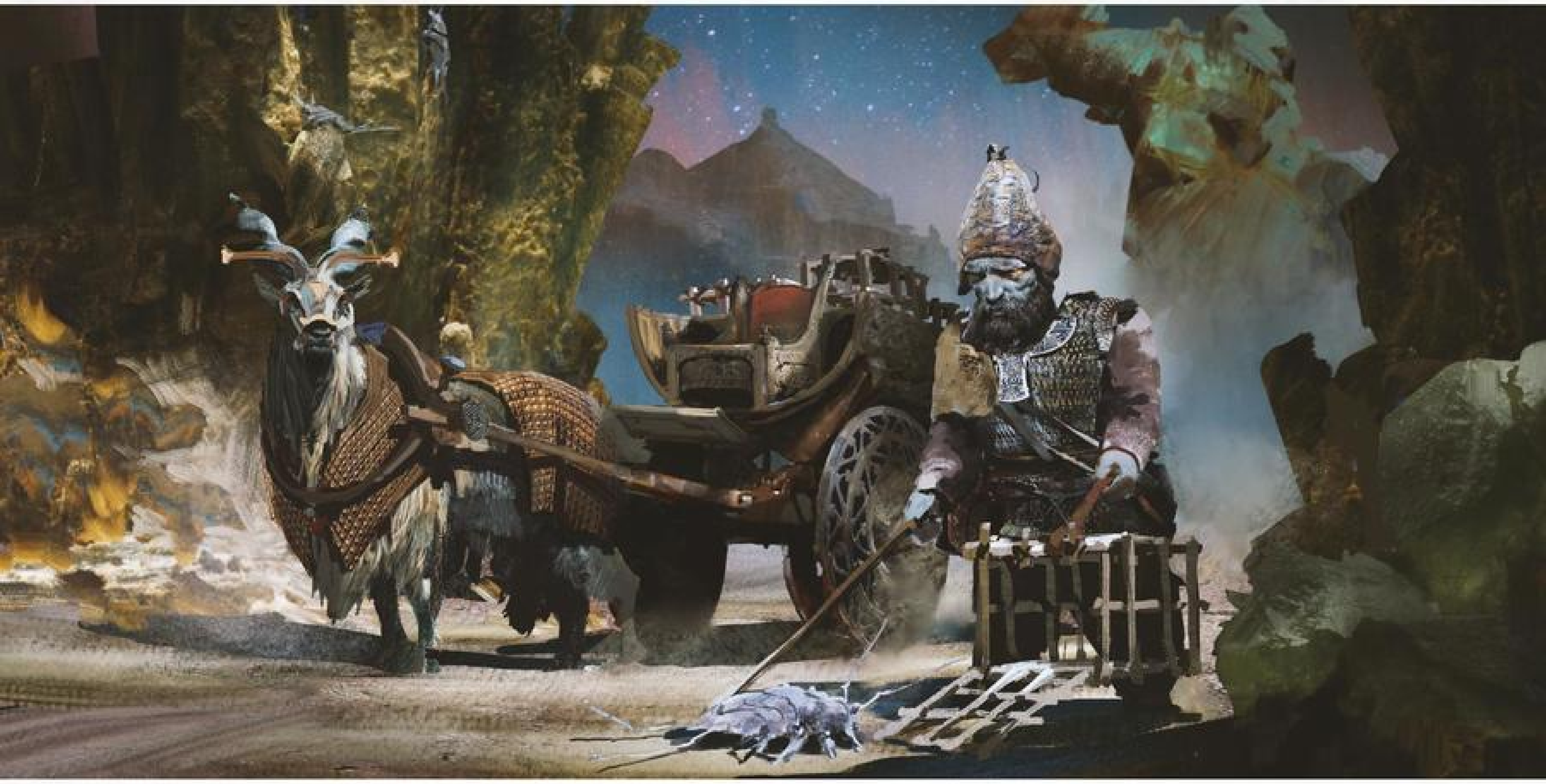


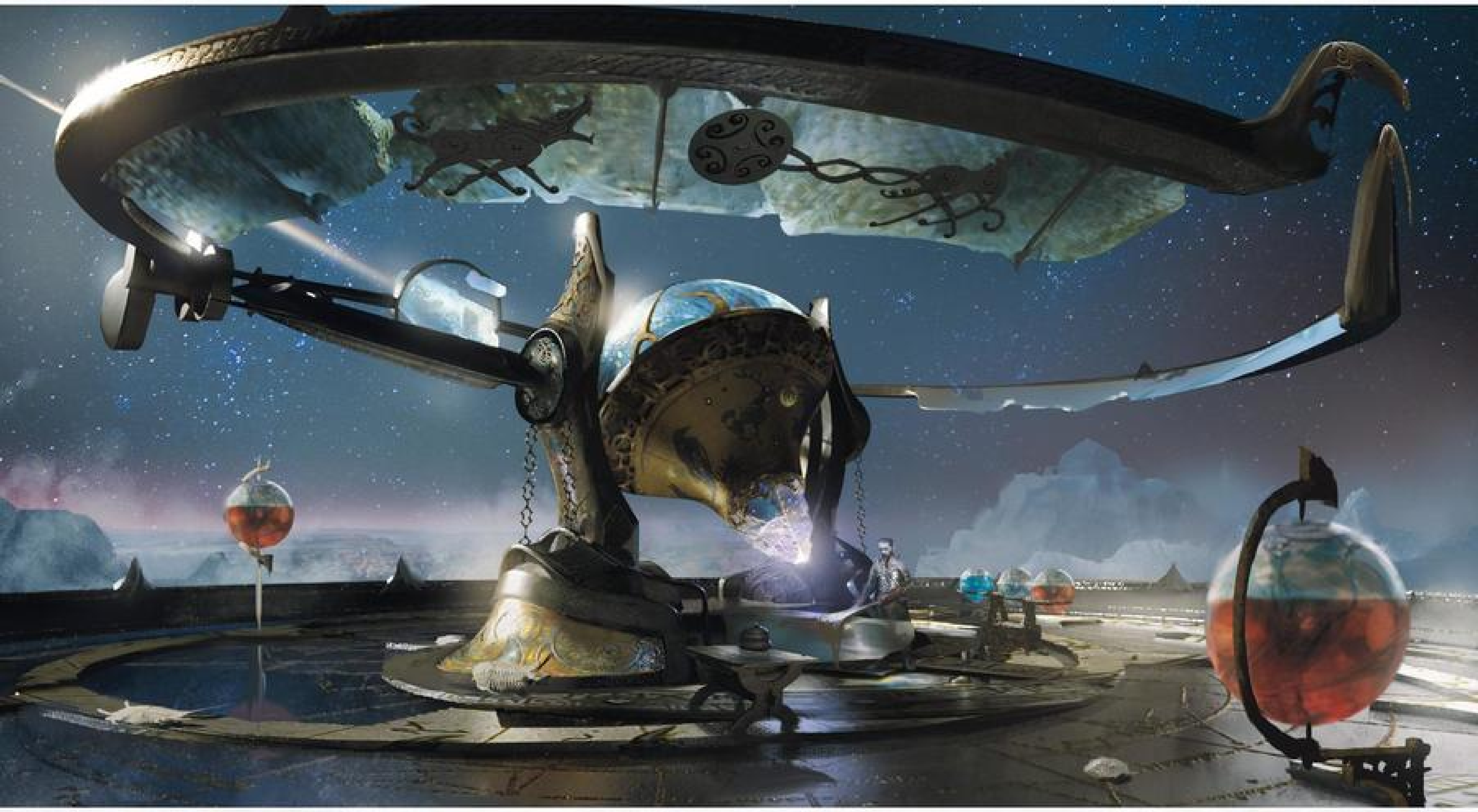
Industry in Svartalfheim. Artist: Mark Castanon



The natural hot springs of Svartalfheim. Artist: Luke Berliner

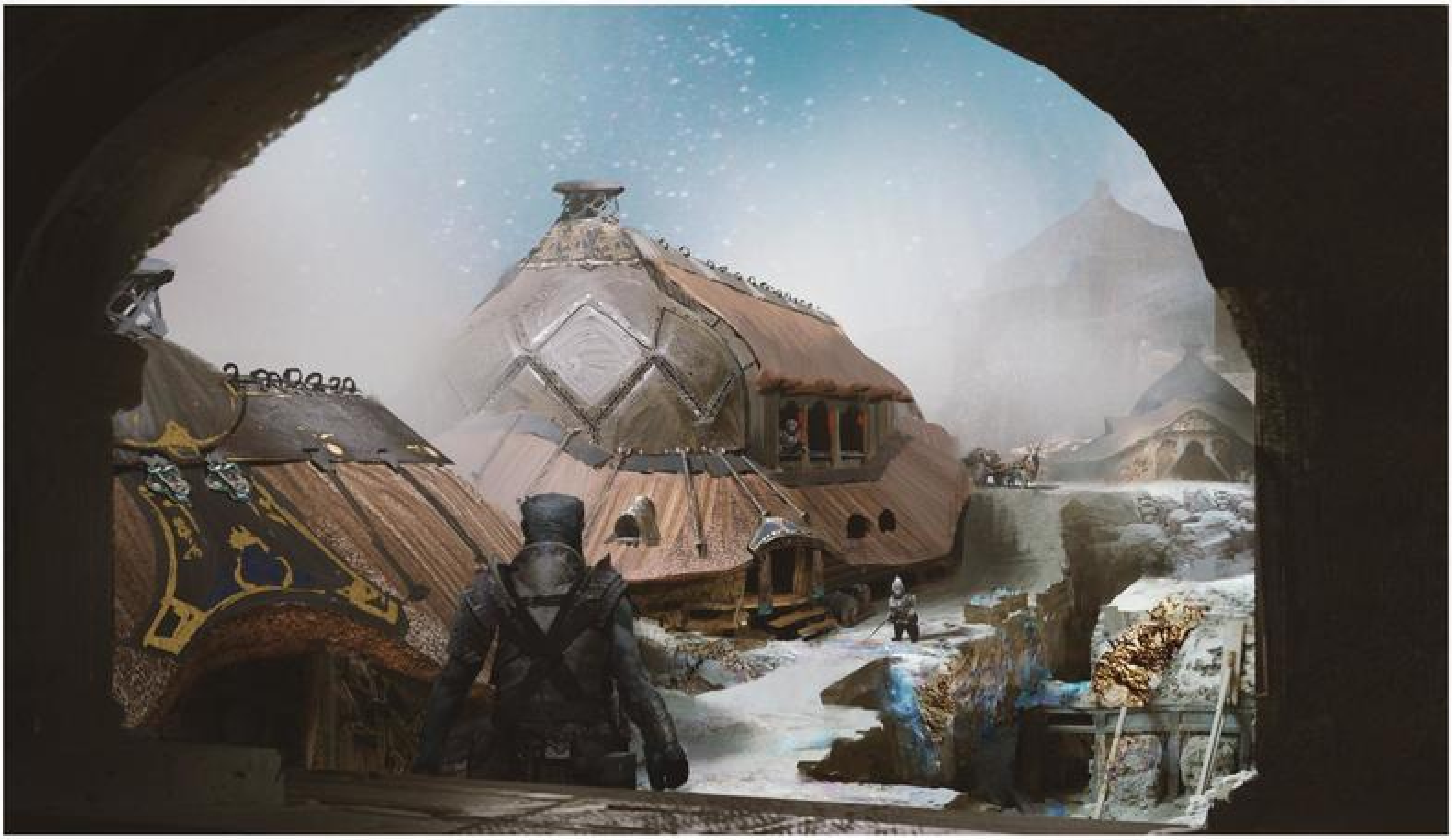
Exploring Svartalfheim's mode of transportation. Artist: Luke Berliner

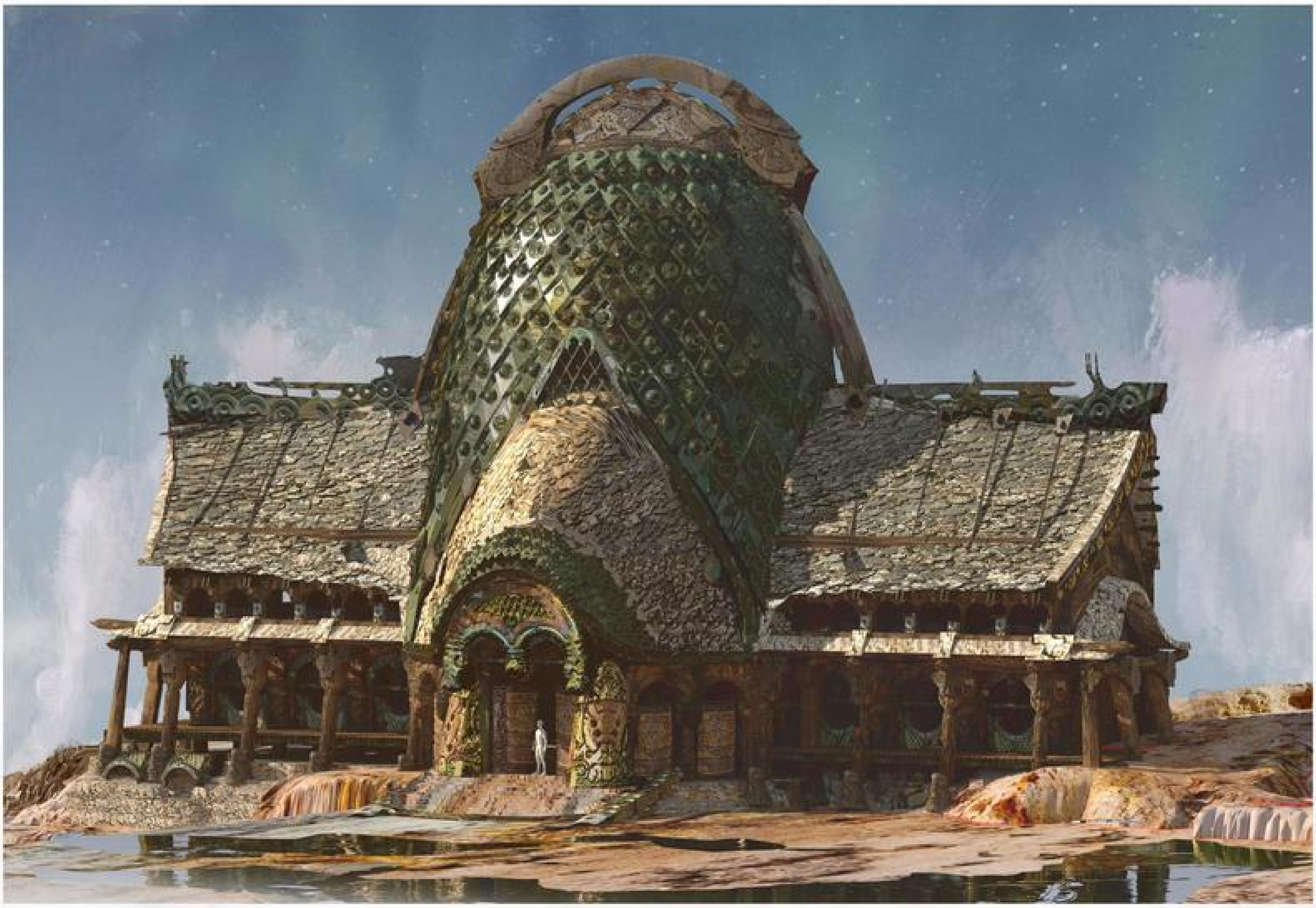




The concepts on the right represent the environment artists' first attempts at blending armorsmithing and architecture. They abstracted the textures from several examples of helmets, chest plates, and chain mail and used them as inspiration for buildings or fastening techniques. If rivets or chain mail rings can bind armor plates, how might that look on a house? Another goal was that the buildings' shapes be distinct from the more classic Viking architecture of Asgard.

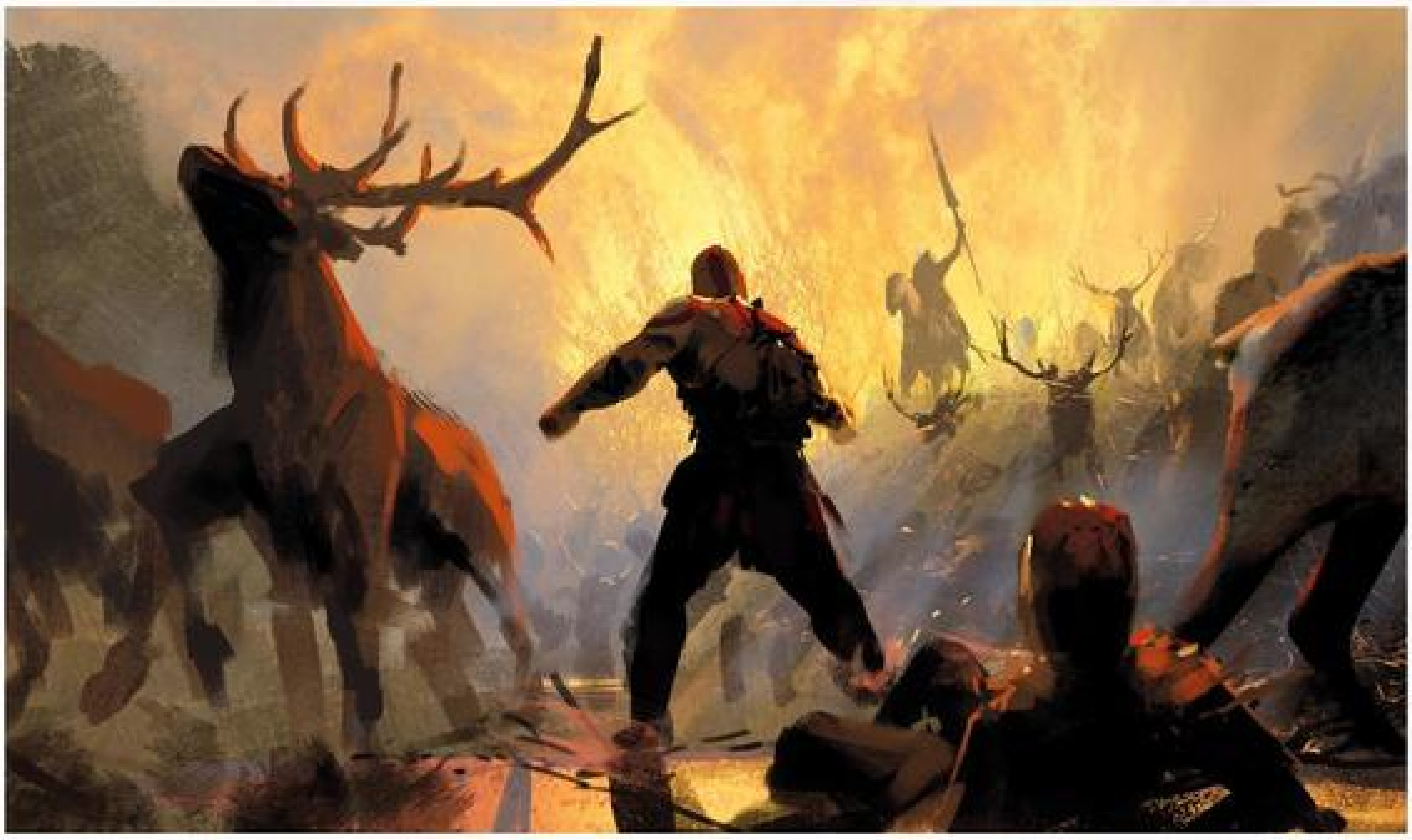
Armored home concepts. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); KARAKTER Design Studio (bottom)

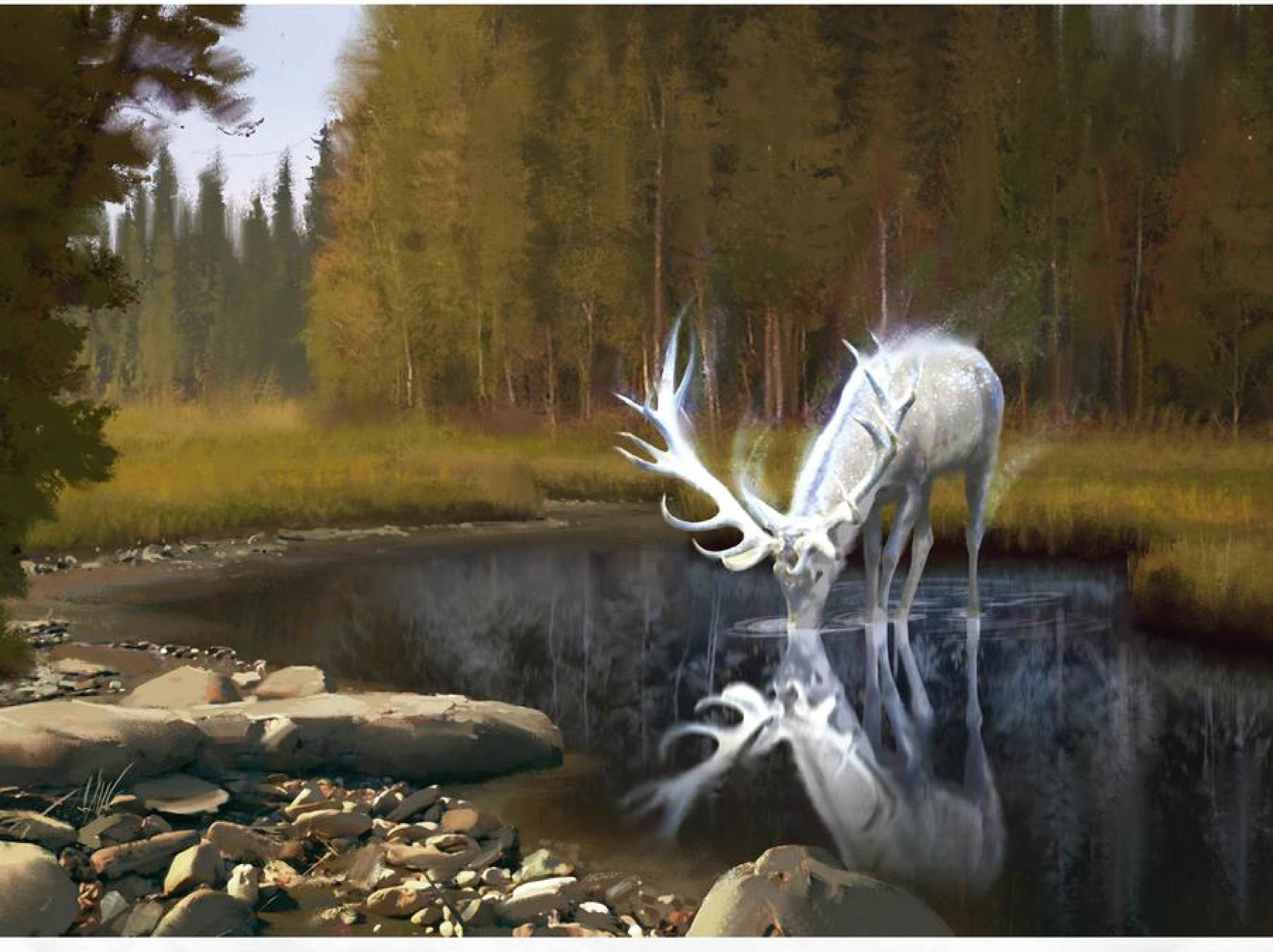




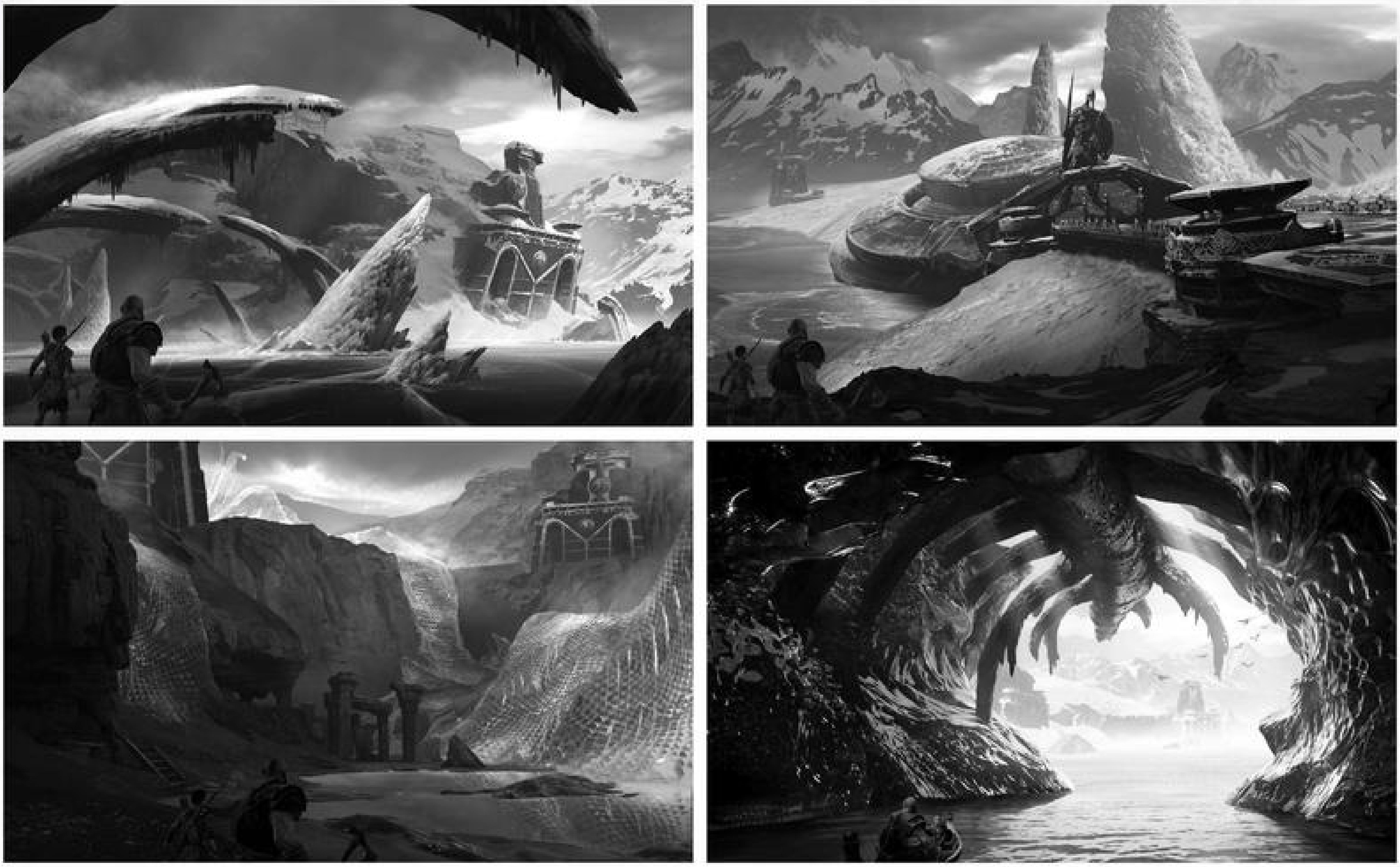
Much of *God of War* took place in Midgard, and as Kratos and Atreus' home, the artists knew they'd revisit the realm in *Ragnarök*. They wanted to add some magic, though. "I had fun with the idea of Season Stags and the thought that these mythical creatures could manipulate the depicted season of Midgard in-game," Castanon recalled. "I created various concepts exploring ways this idea could manifest. Each image was a creative challenge in contrasting the stag of a particular season with the current season depicted in the environment."

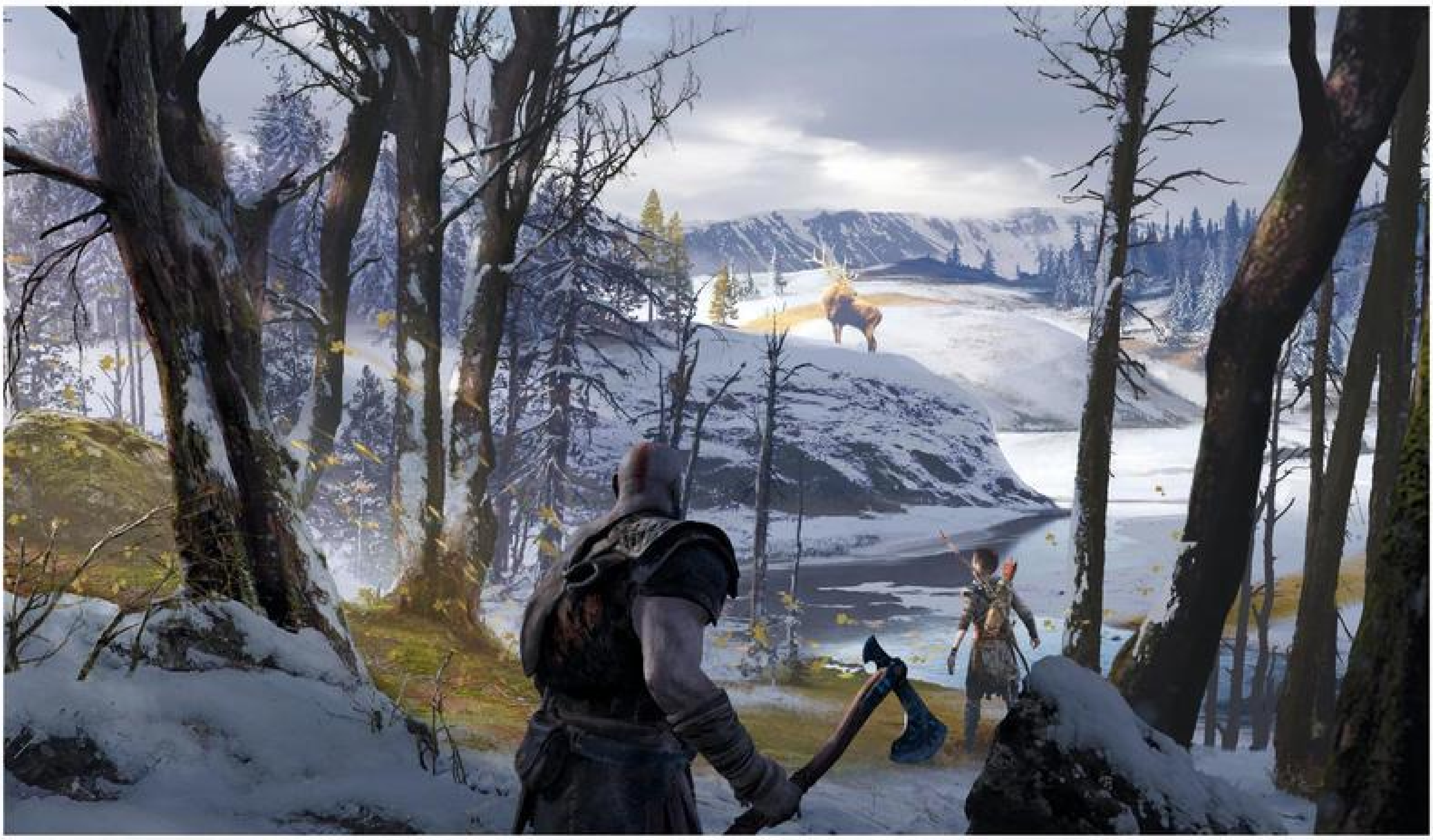
Fire in Midgard. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)





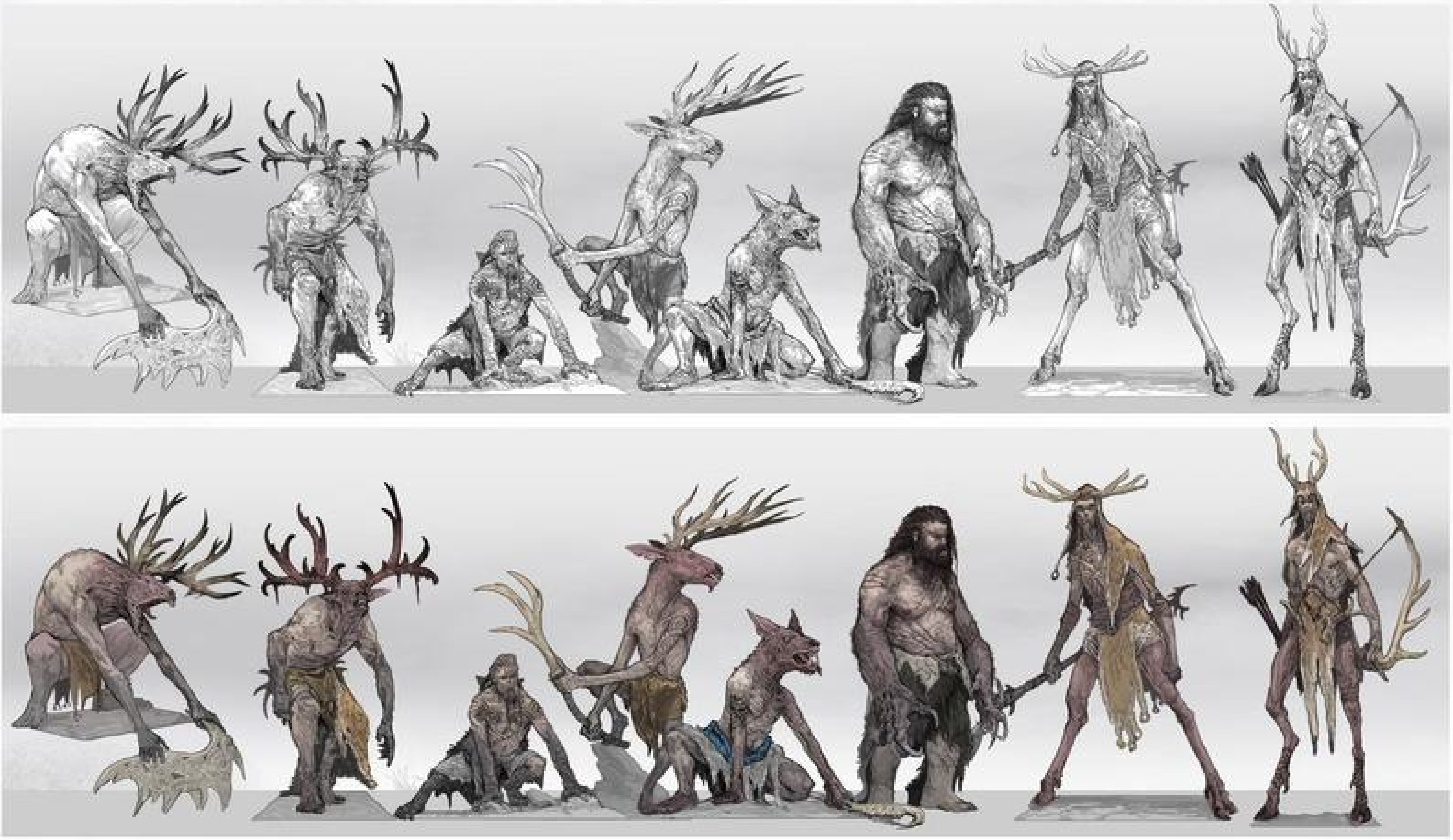
Midgardian vistas. Artist: Mark Castanon

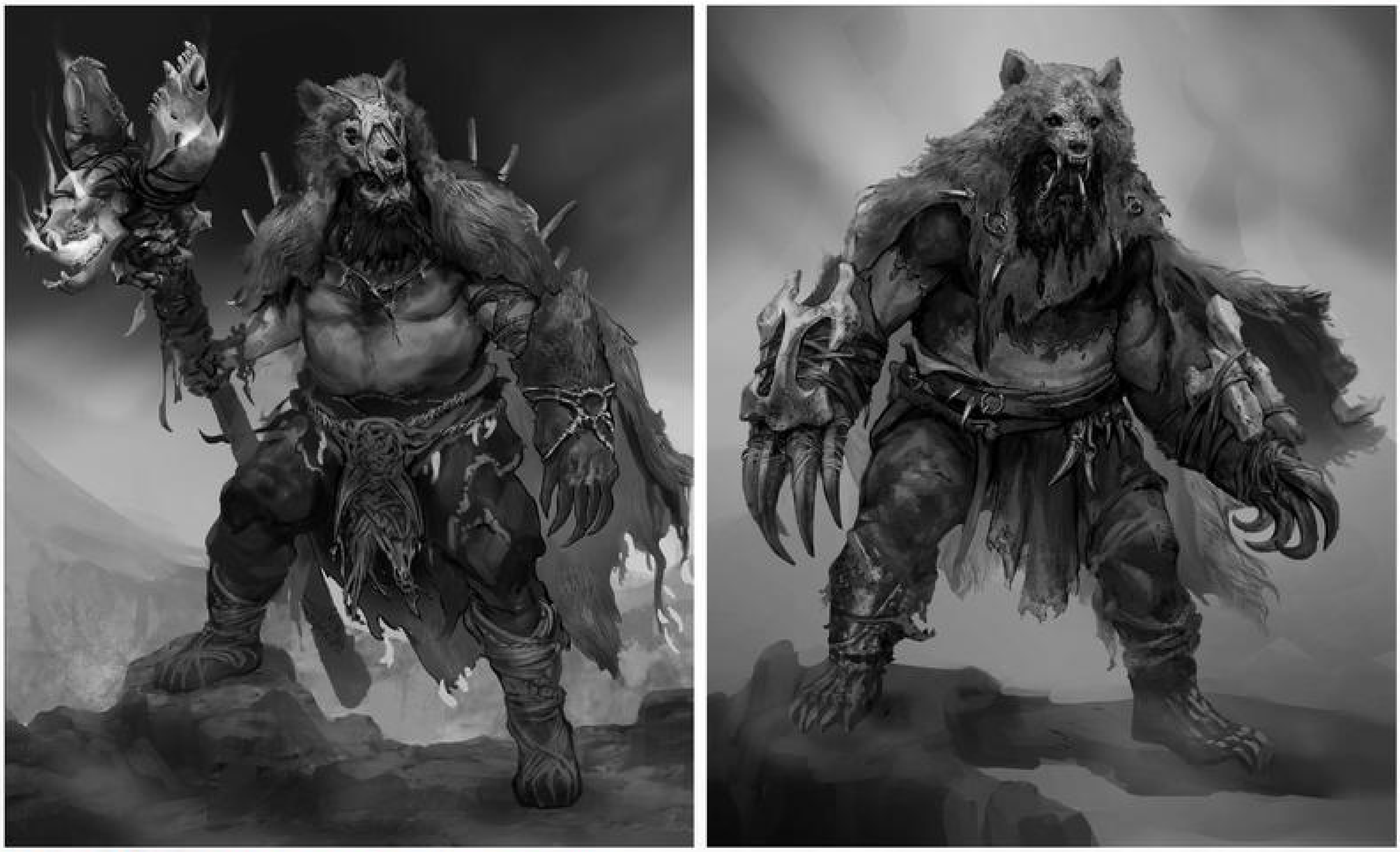




The extended state of Fimbulwinter stretches its chilled fingers across the realms. Castanon focused on Caldera Lake in the earliest work for Midgard, determining the potential impact the mythical winter had on the region. He wanted these images to be a stunning contrast from Caldera as it was seen in *God of War*, while also giving the level-design team some interesting visual features to play with.

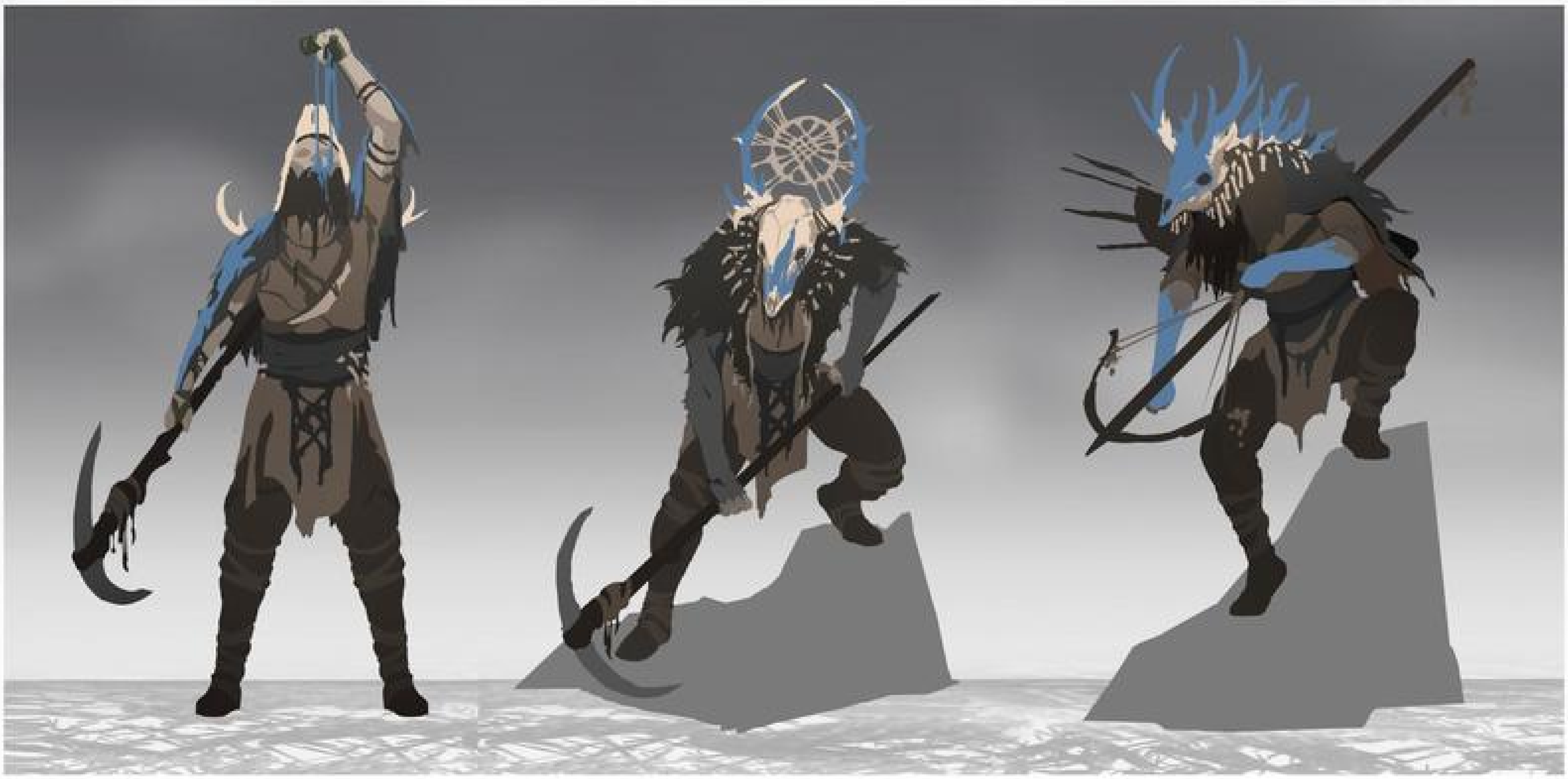
Berserkers as animal hybrids. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Yefim Kligerman (bottom)

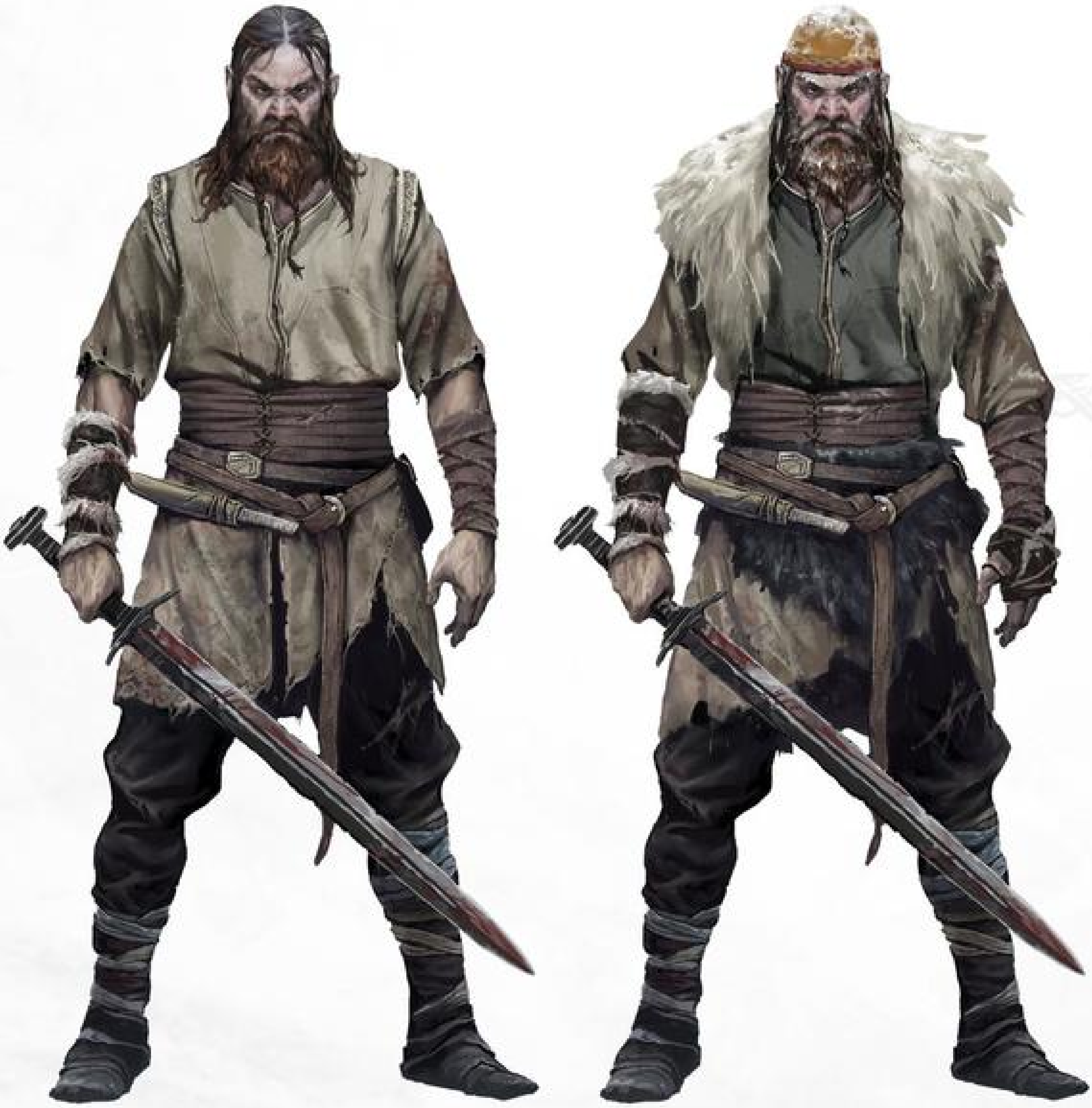




Wild and reckless enemies, berserkers fight with animalistic style. Early designs depicted berserkers as animal hybrids, but ultimately, the concept pivoted toward humans with animal totems and stances. "Early on, I wanted to explore if they could stand or walk in uncommon ways, like using stilts to mimic a stag's gait or perching themselves on branches like owls," said concept artist Yefim Kligerman. "I even tried sharpened teeth and claws to have the berserkers get into nonhuman key poses and look more unnerving."

Experimenting with berserkers' animal power. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Shan Qiao (bottom)





The world of *Ragnarök* is populated with more than just mythical beings and creatures; the more basic human characters need an interesting and distinct look too. With the bandits, the artists wanted them to look threatening despite their ragtag appearance.

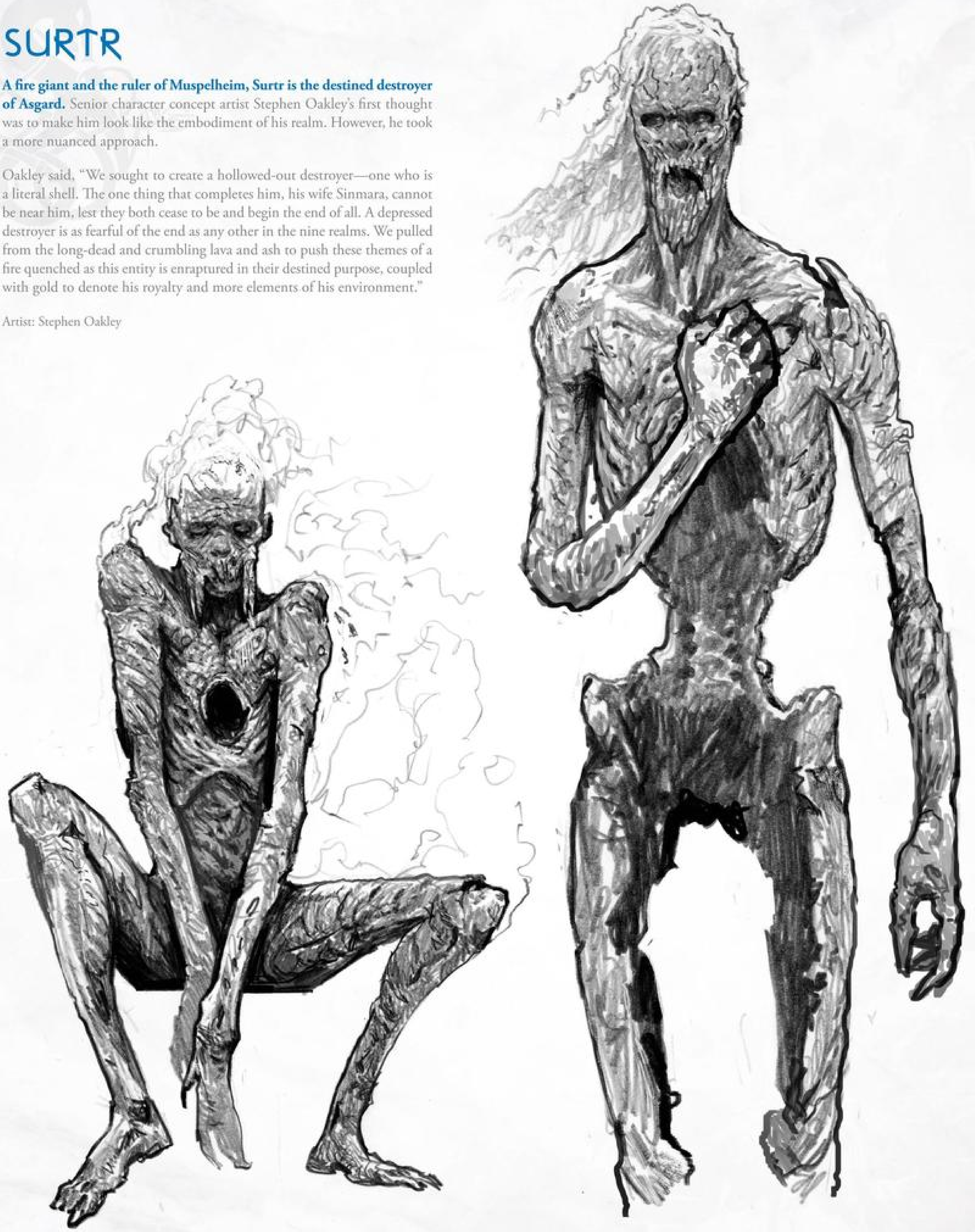
Character concept artist Shan Qiao said, "They are a people surviving in this harsh cold of Fimbulwinter, so the clothing they wore needed to reflect that—a simple yet extremely practical design. Even their weapons and tools should have that overused look to show the limited resources they had in the wild."

SURTR

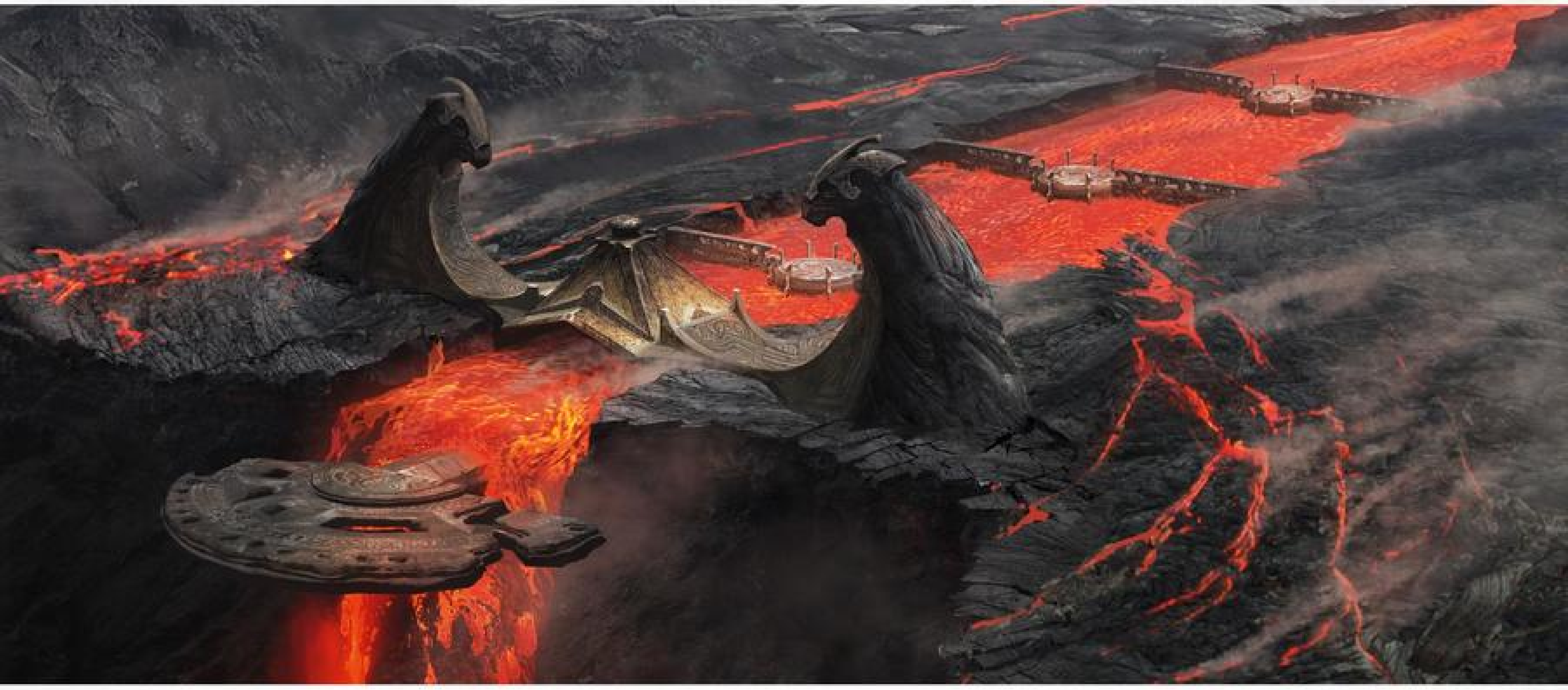
A fire giant and the ruler of Muspelheim, Surtr is the destined destroyer of Asgard. Senior character concept artist Stephen Oakley's first thought was to make him look like the embodiment of his realm. However, he took a more nuanced approach.

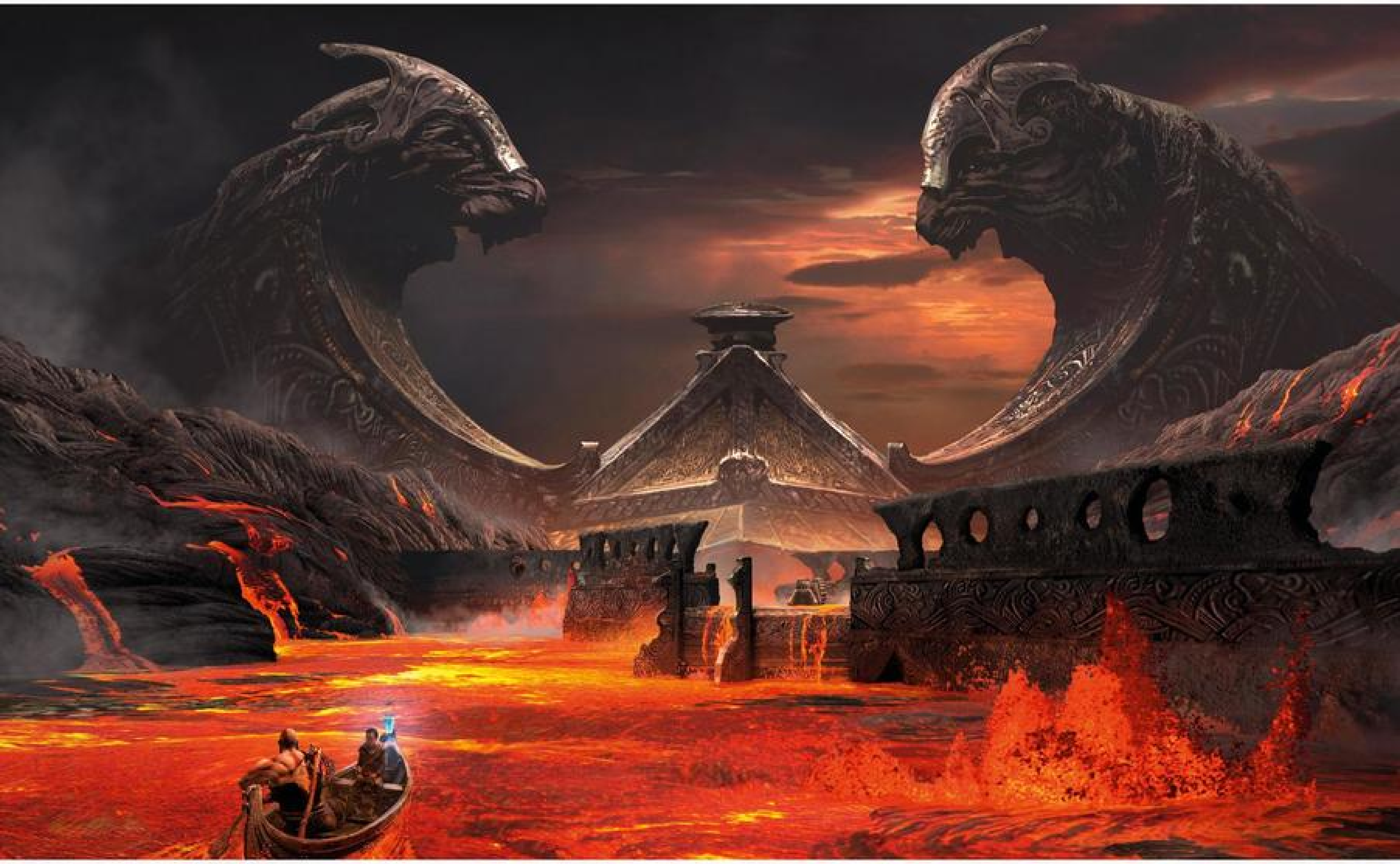
Oakley said, "We sought to create a hollowed-out destroyer—one who is a literal shell. The one thing that completes him, his wife Sinmara, cannot be near him, lest they both cease to be and begin the end of all. A depressed destroyer is as fearful of the end as any other in the nine realms. We pulled from the long-dead and crumbling lava and ash to push these themes of a fire quenched as this entity is enraptured in their destined purpose, coupled with gold to denote his royalty and more elements of his environment."

Artist: Stephen Oakley



Concepts for Muspelheim's lava flows. Artist: Mark Castanon

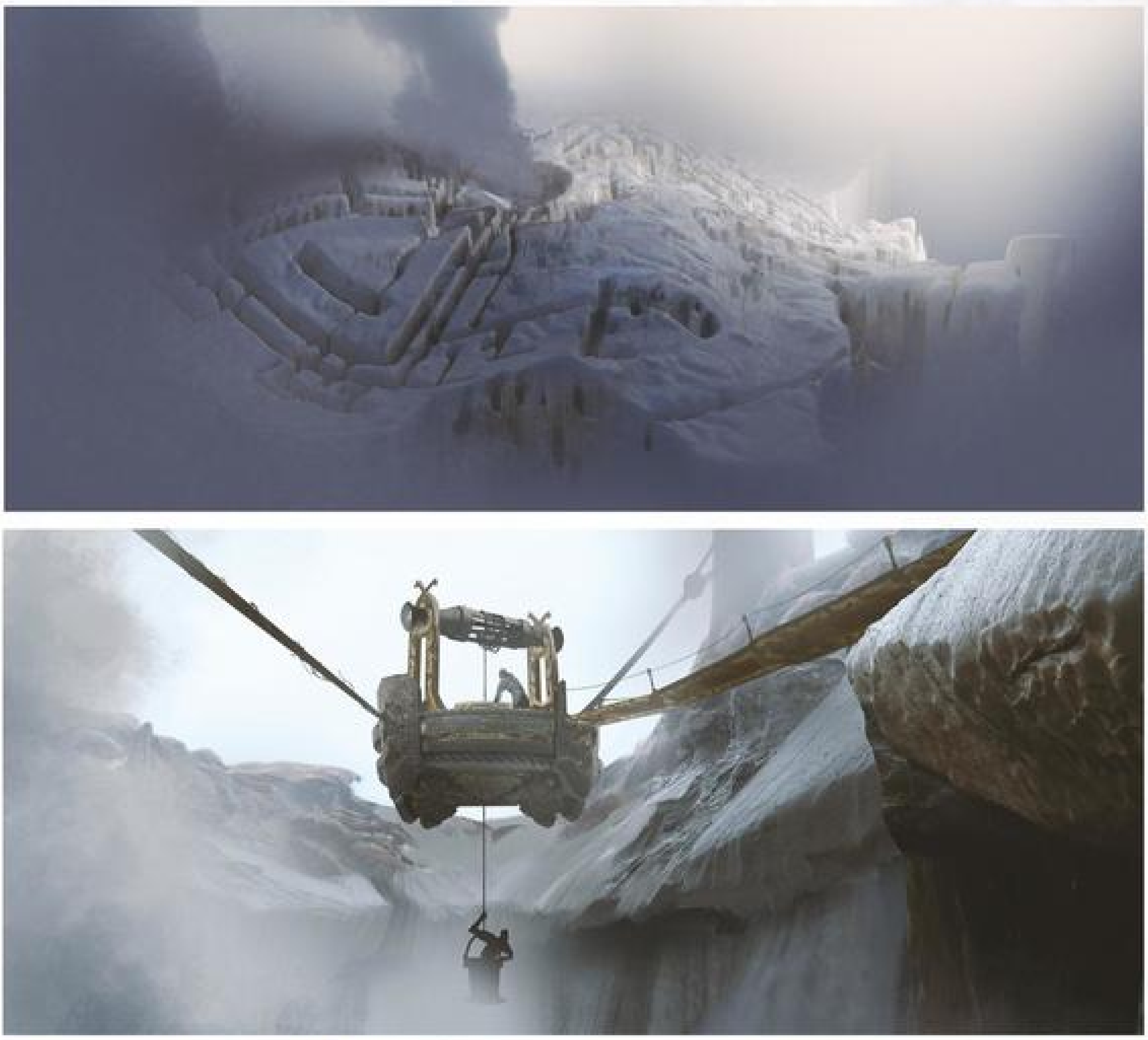


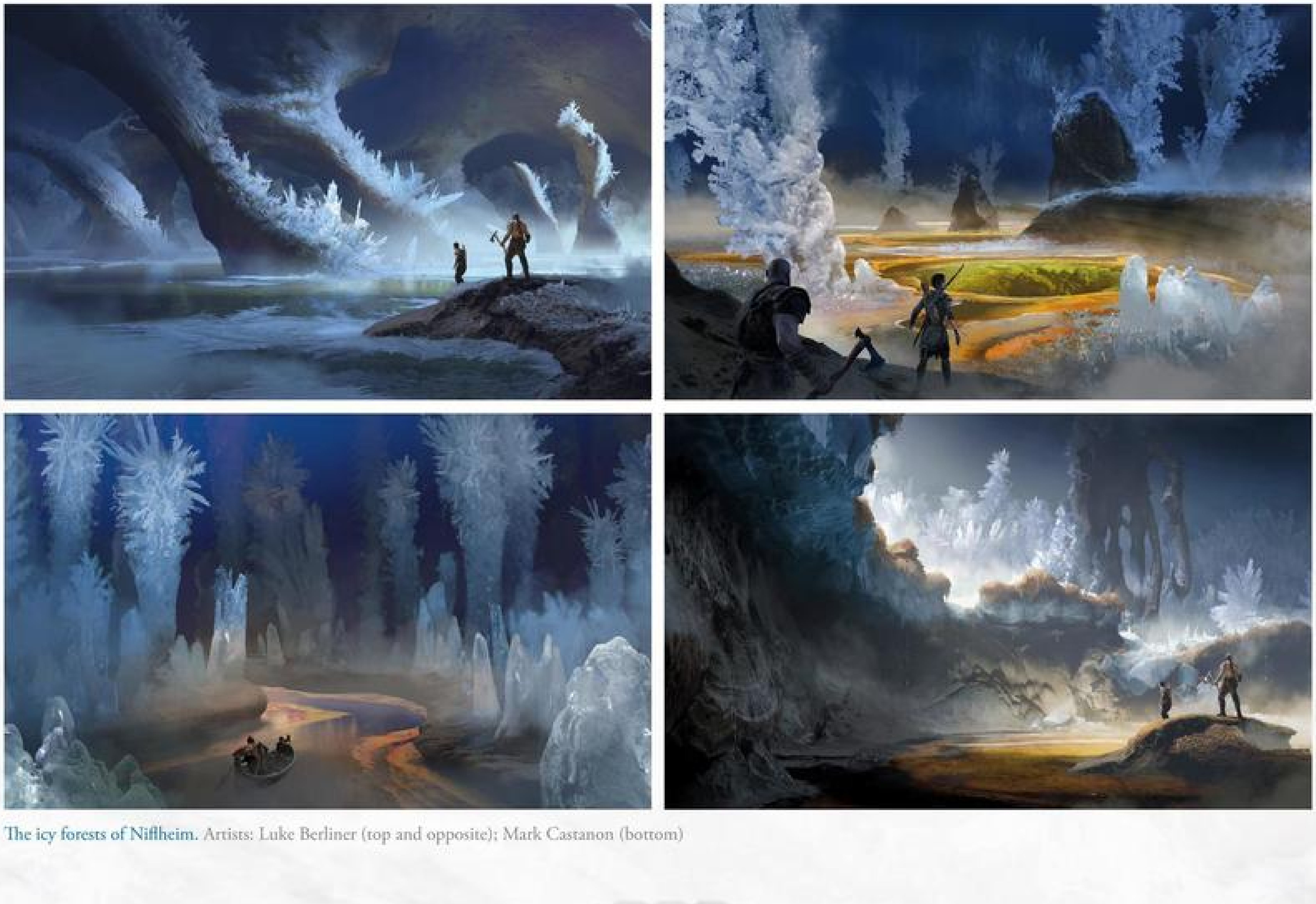


Lava, ash, and fire. These ingredients compose the core of Muspelheim's visual language. The realm of fire introduced in the previous game gets more attention in *Ragnarök* as the game introduces its ruler, Surtr. Environment artists considered the immense scale of the fire giants when imagining towering structures and the wide rivers of spurting lava.

Since *God of War* had already visited Niflheim, a realm covered in poisonous mist, the artists had to consider how to expand upon their existing depiction. Early on, Berliner and Castanon considered the idea of a connection between Muspelheim and Niflheim that travelers could access via a mystical well.

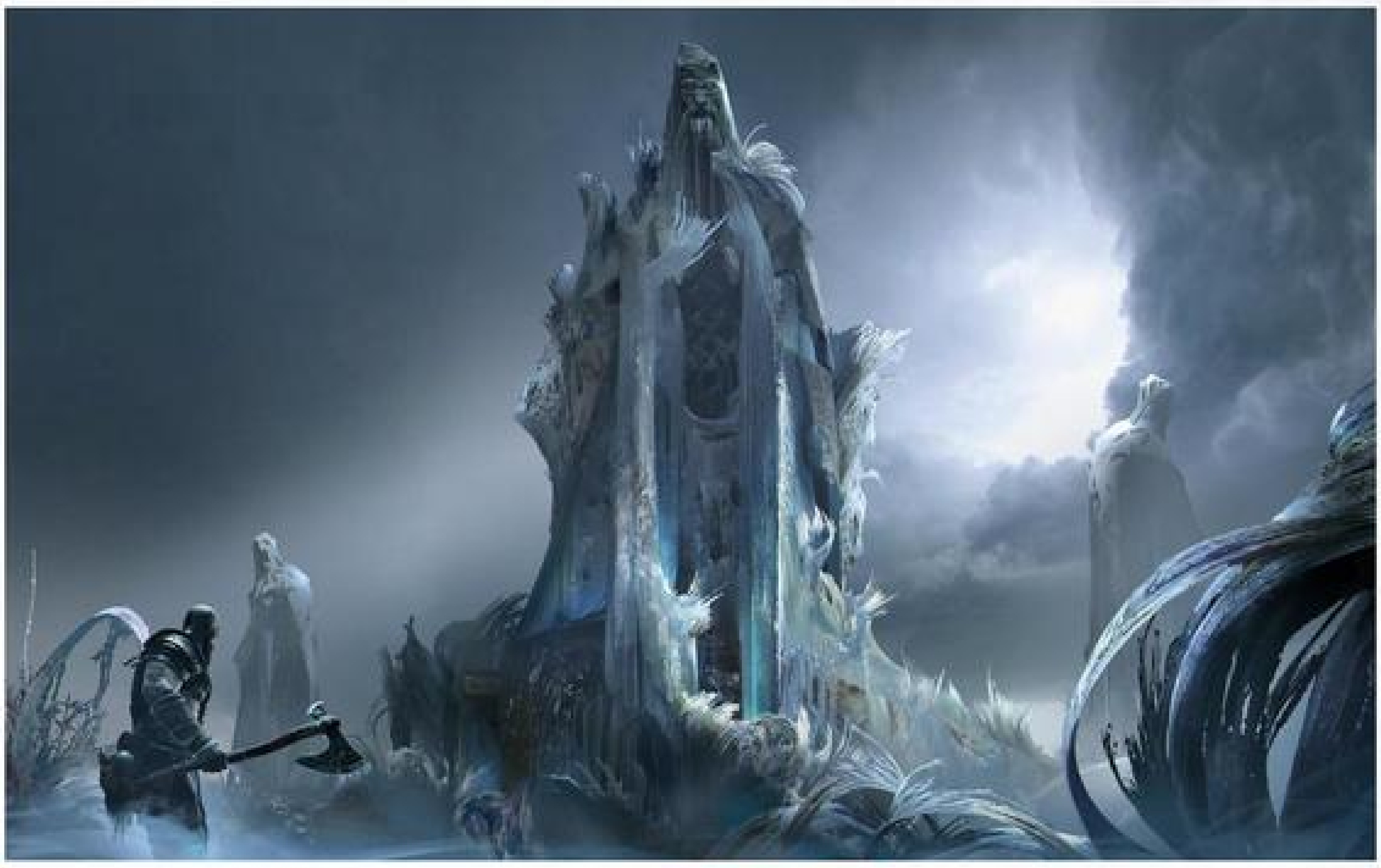
Berliner said, "That connection transitioned to the Spark of the World found in-game. The idea of getting into a bucket and being lowered into a well is such a strong, classic fantasy visual. It stayed with the team for years, ultimately inspiring the forge in Svartalfheim."

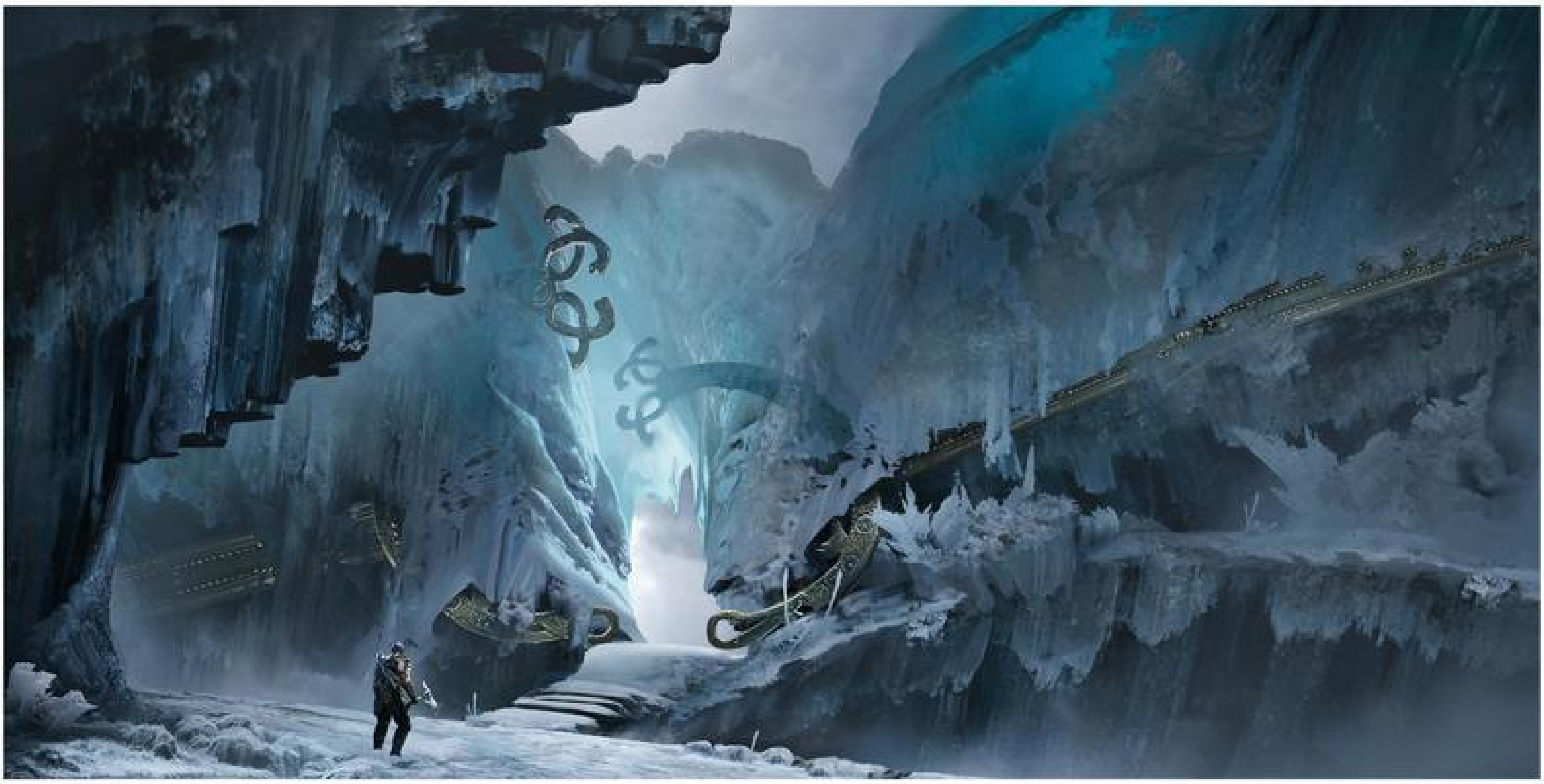


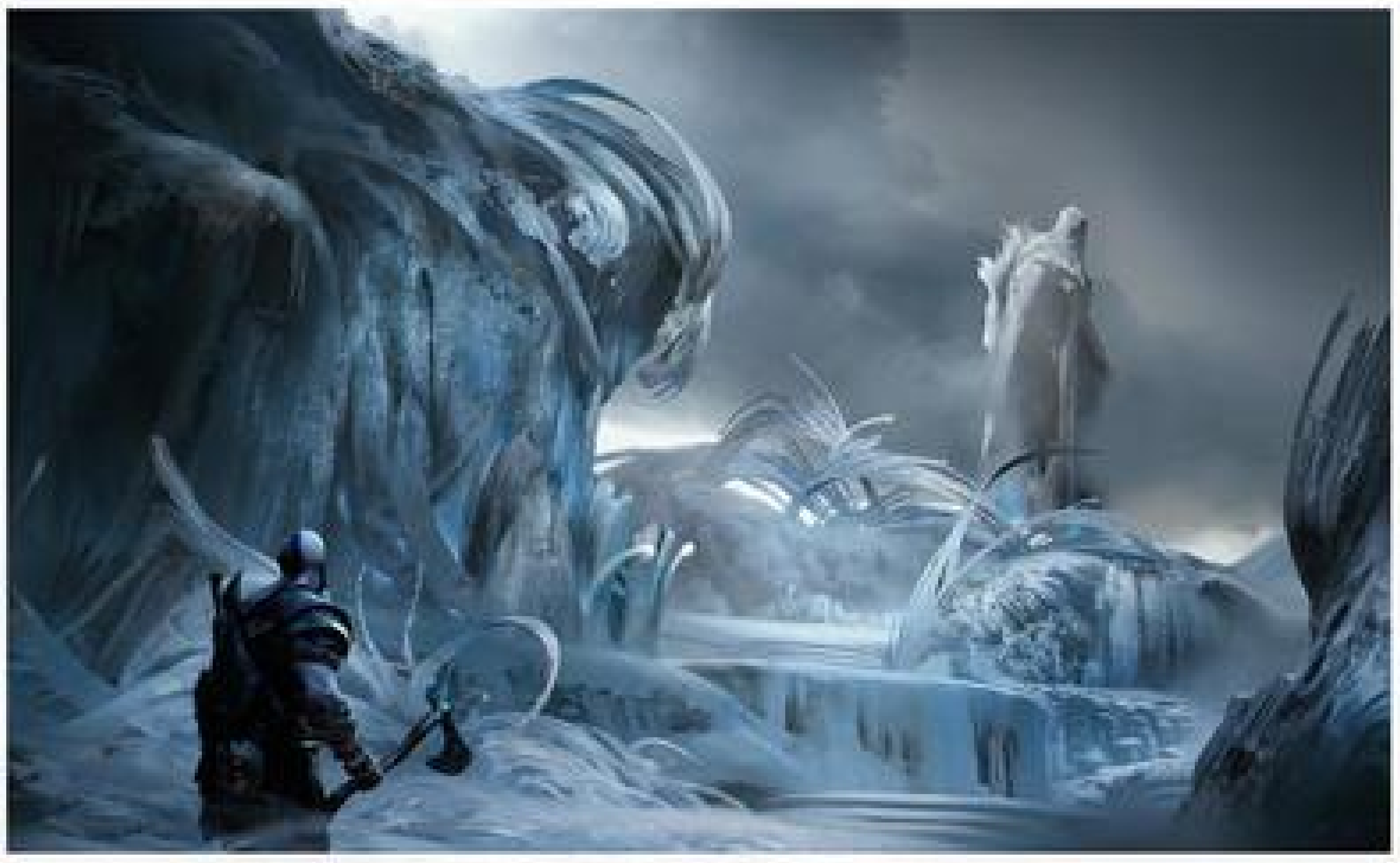


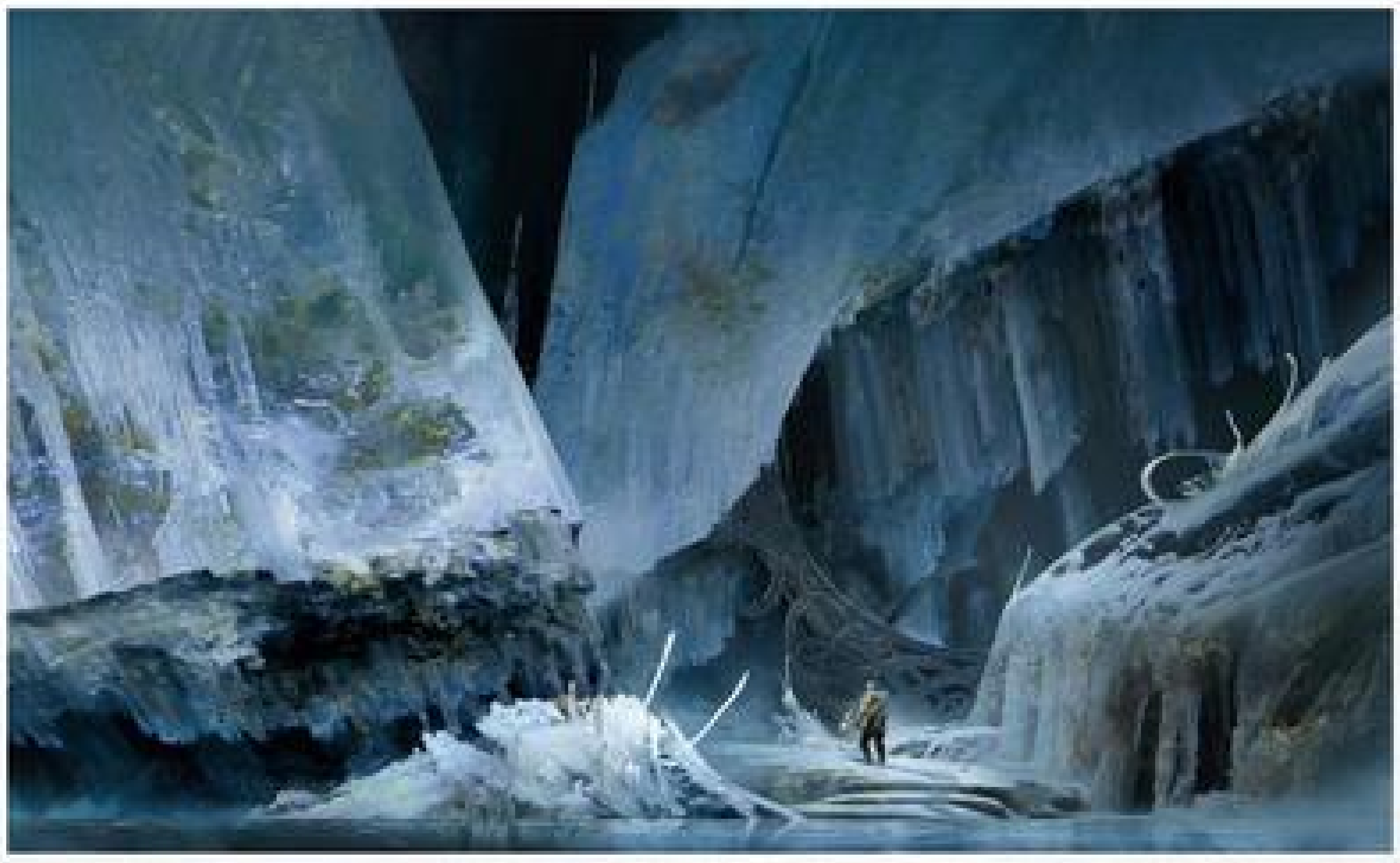
The icy forests of Niflheim. Artists: Luke Berliner (top and opposite); Mark Castanon (bottom)

Artist Abe Taraky rejoined the team early in development after having made tremendous contributions to *God of War*. Here, Taraky quickly expanded upon the ideas they had for Niflheim. He incorporated statues similar to those found in the previous game and brought in the "swooping-hair ice shapes" that further distinguish Niflheim from Helheim. Taraky was keen to represent Auðumbla—a cow in Norse creation myths—in Niflheim. The cow soon became a key point of interest.

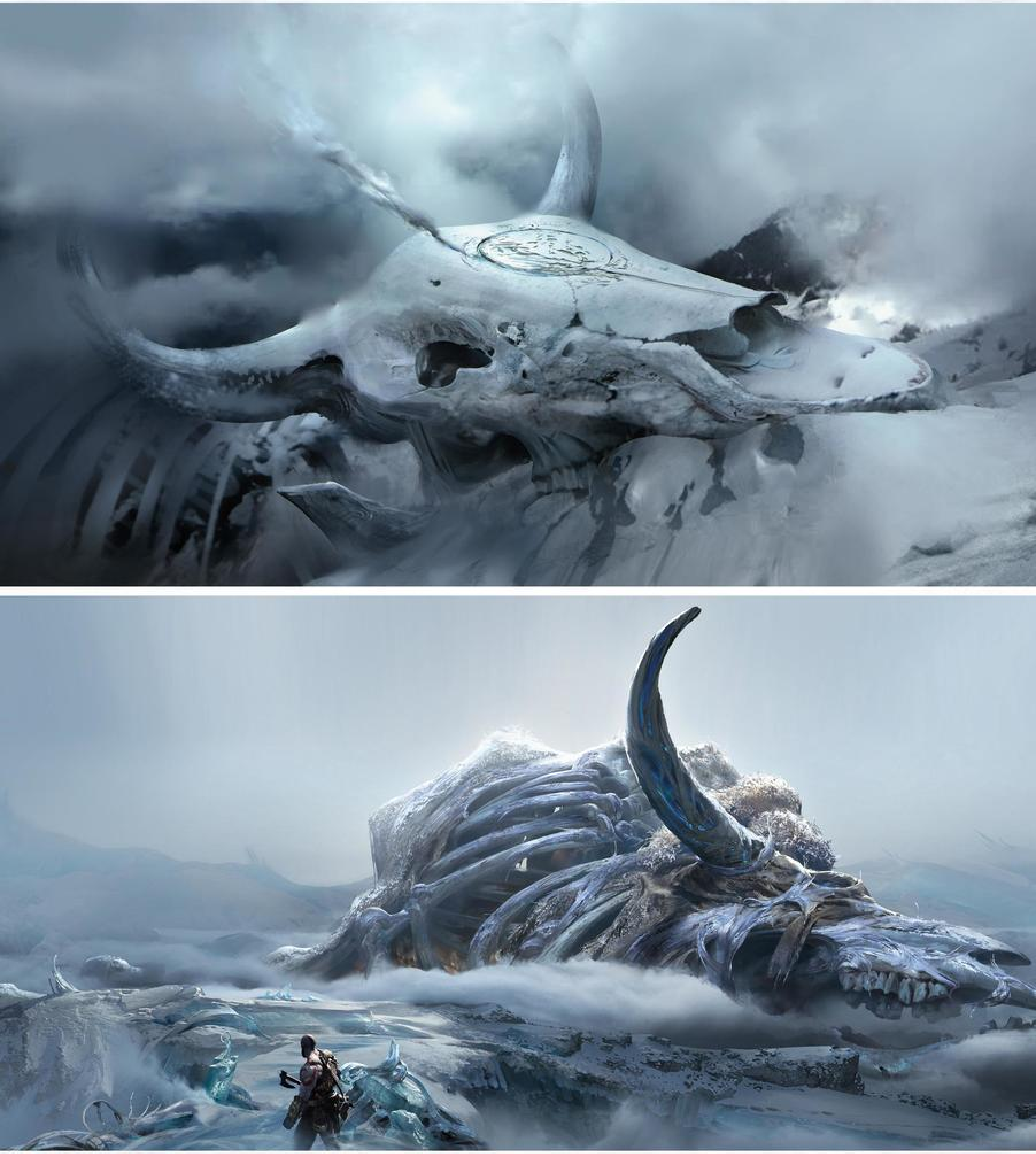






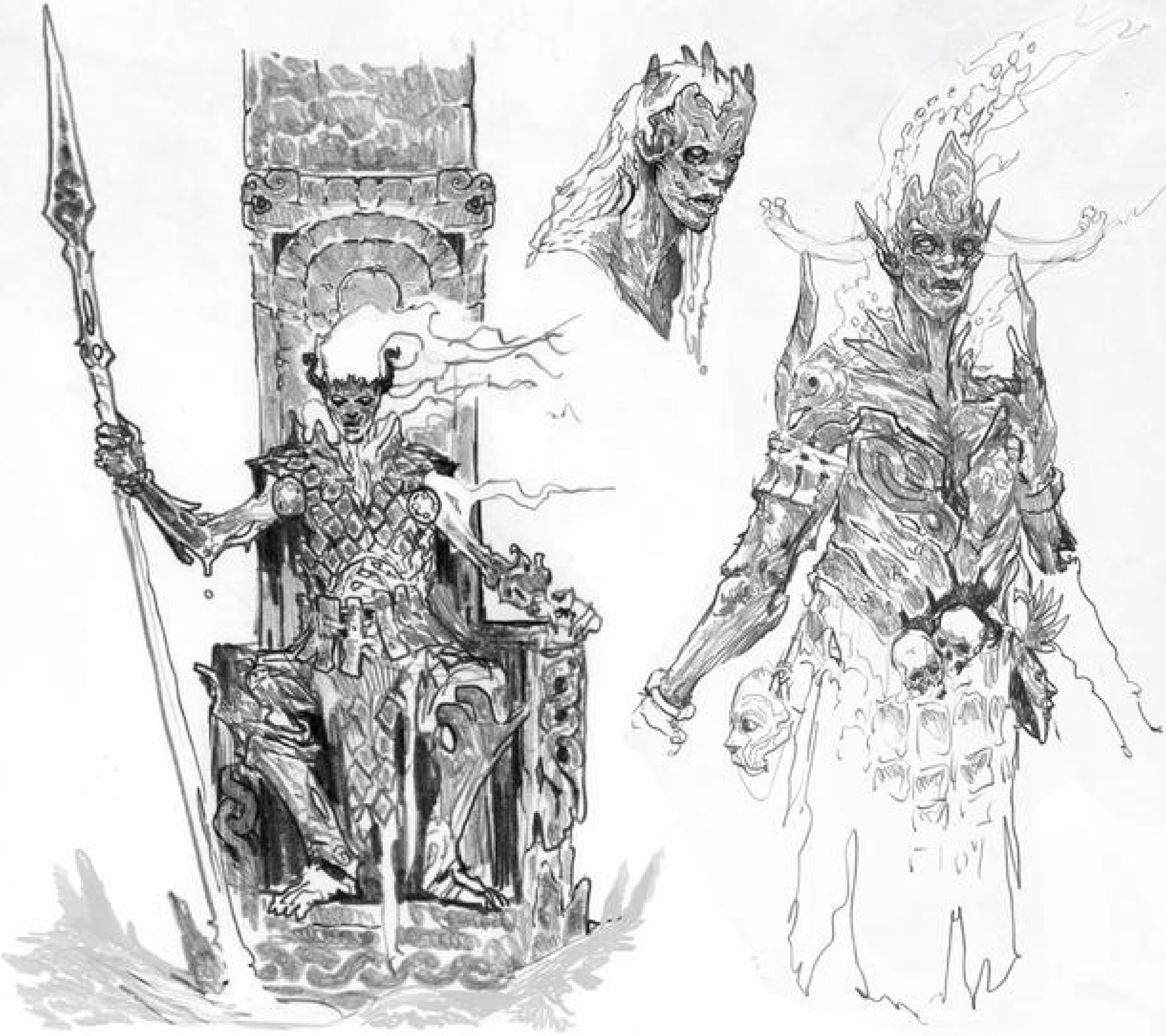


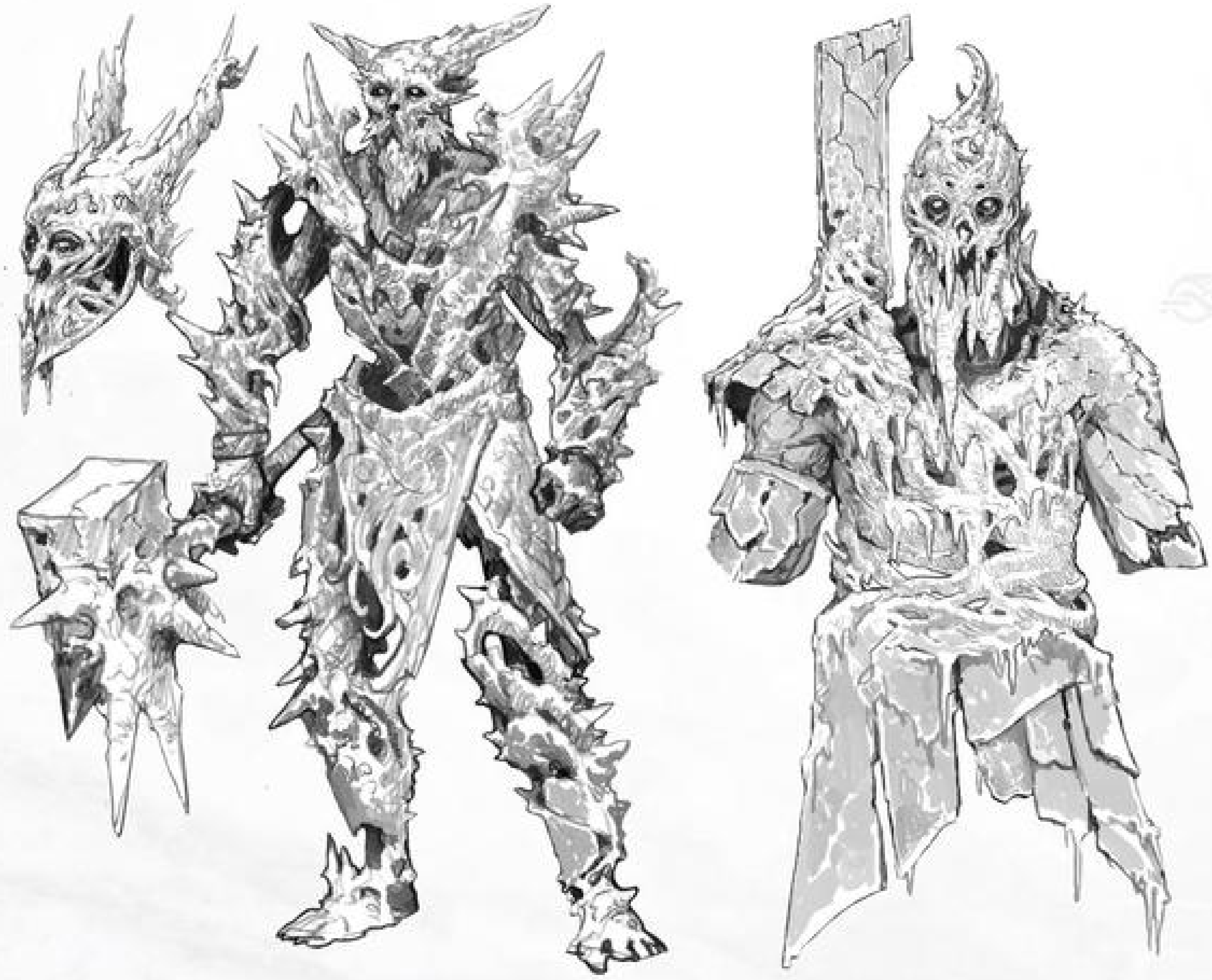
Niflheim's sweeping ice paths. Artist: Abe Taraky



Auðumbla's skull. Artist: Abe Taraky

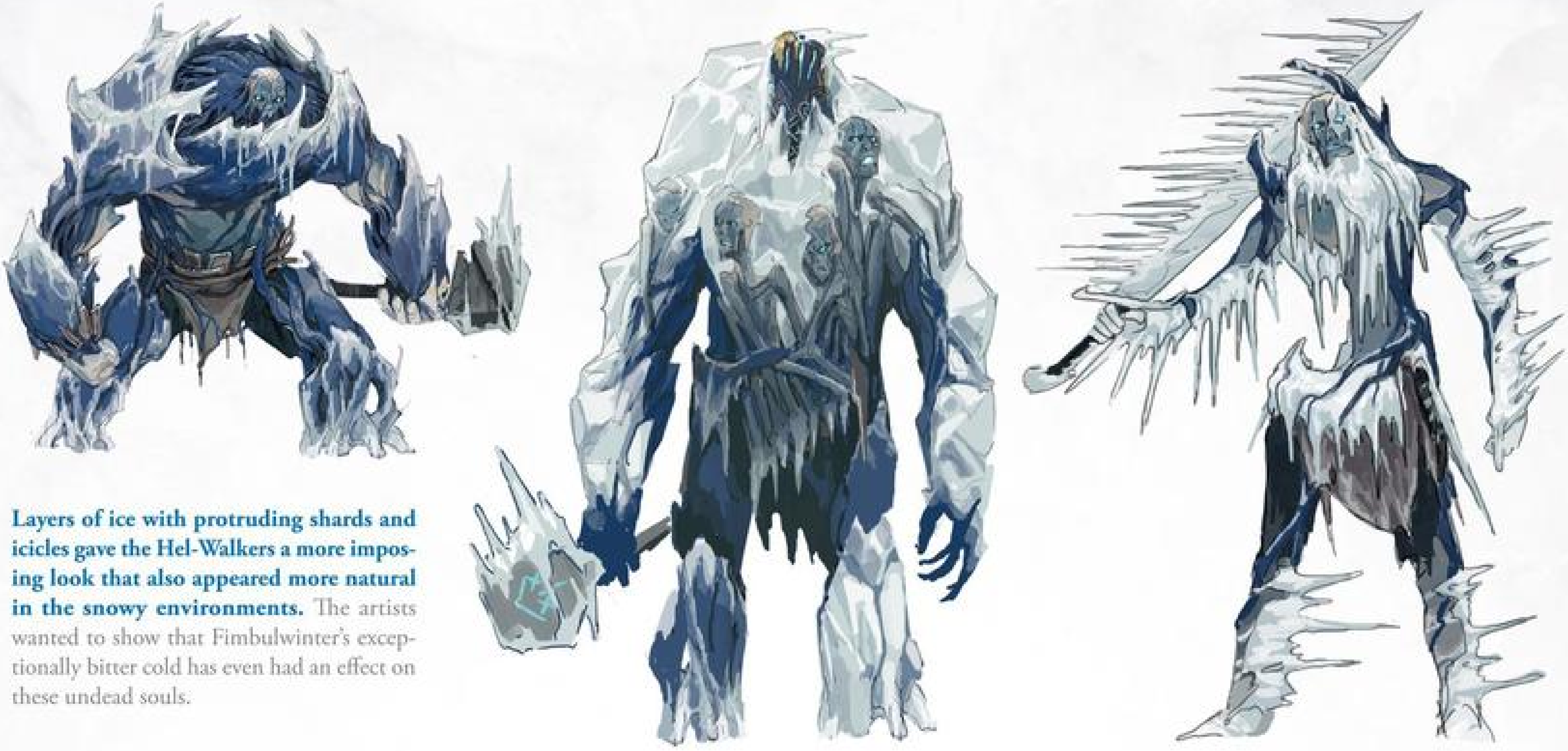
The undead Draugr appeared as a common enemy for Kratos and Atreus throughout *God of War*. The foes return for *Ragnarök*, and the artists dedicated time to updating the reanimated warrior corpses for additional variety. Oakley explained, "We desired a bit more control in the chaos of their design. We also wanted to inject some new life and differentiation, so we added fearsome female warriors who also turned from the Valkyries when their mortal lives ended. While we aimed to update the enemy, we wanted to ensure that most of our efforts were focused on new enemies to surprise players while not leaving behind these iconic grunts."



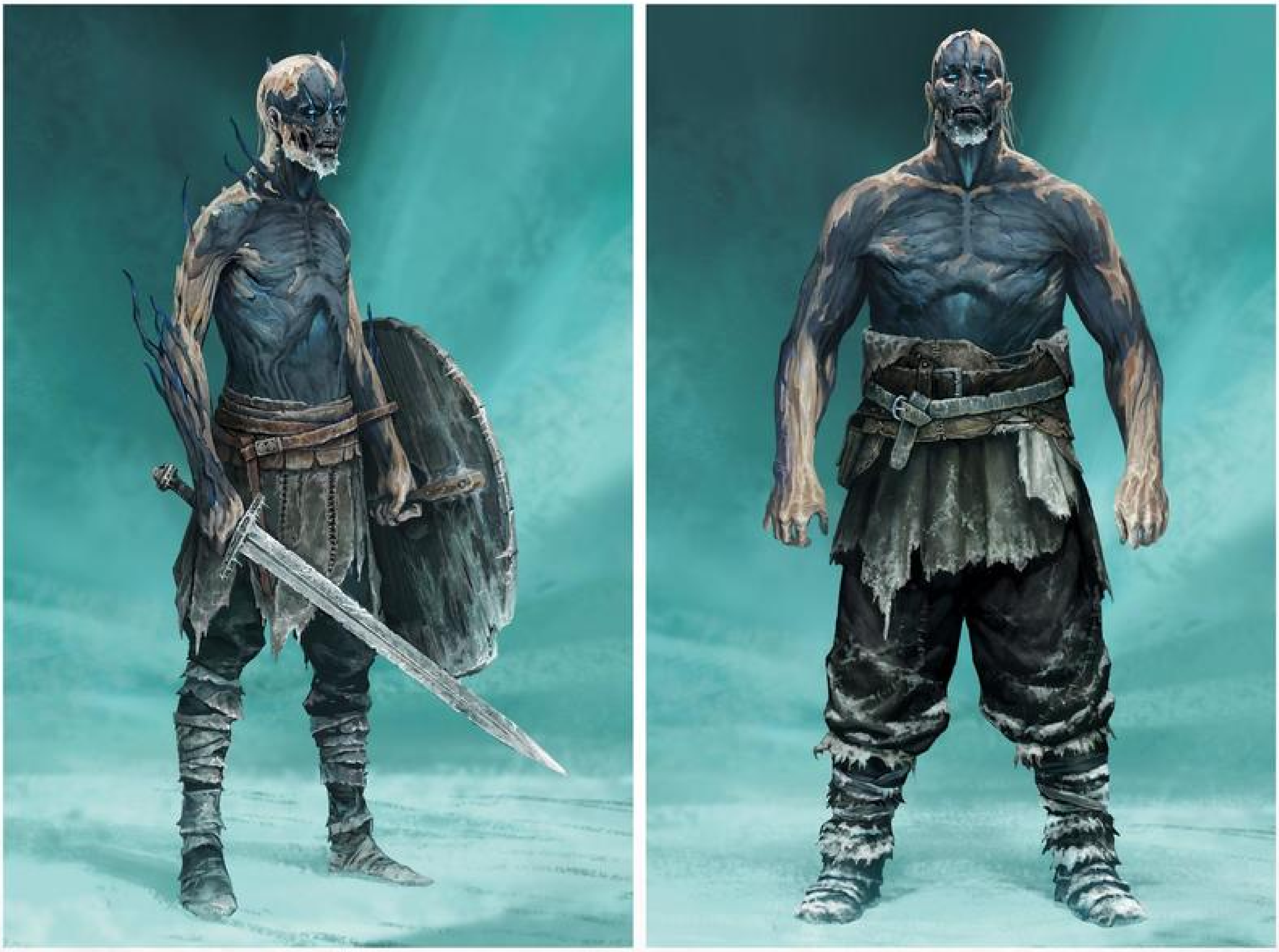


Hel-Walkers, wandering souls that cannot gain entry to the overcrowded Helheim, also torment Kratos and Atreus on their journey. While the artists wanted to keep the enemies looking like the iconic designs from *God of War*, they leaned in a more extreme wintery direction. "We looked at real-life frost damage and reference of dried and dead skin to see how far we could push the graphic read of this character. Since they are the remains of the dead, I pushed hard to emphasize that lifeless feeling in all these characters," Qiao said.

Artist: Stephen Oakley



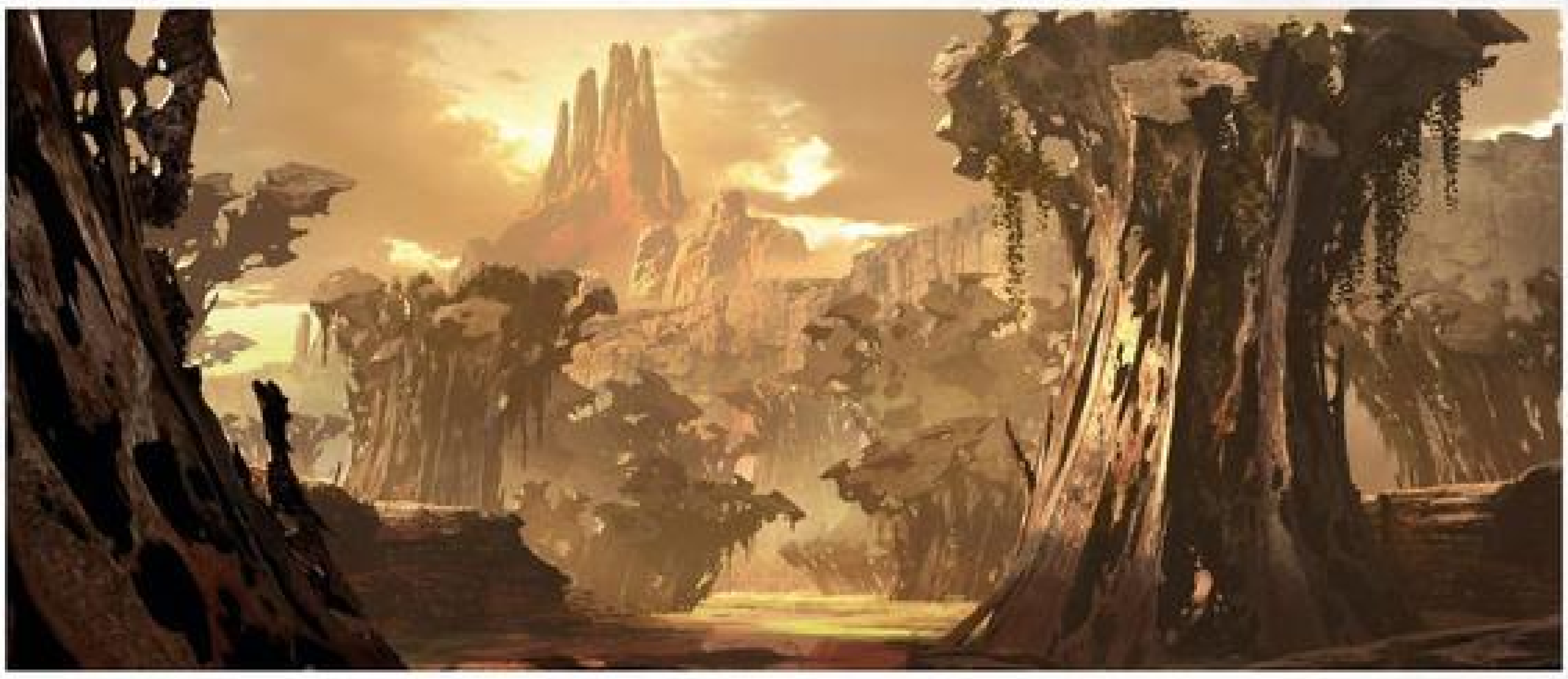
Layers of ice with protruding shards and icicles gave the Hel-Walkers a more imposing look that also appeared more natural in the snowy environments. The artists wanted to show that Fimbulwinter's exceptionally bitter cold has even had an effect on these undead souls.

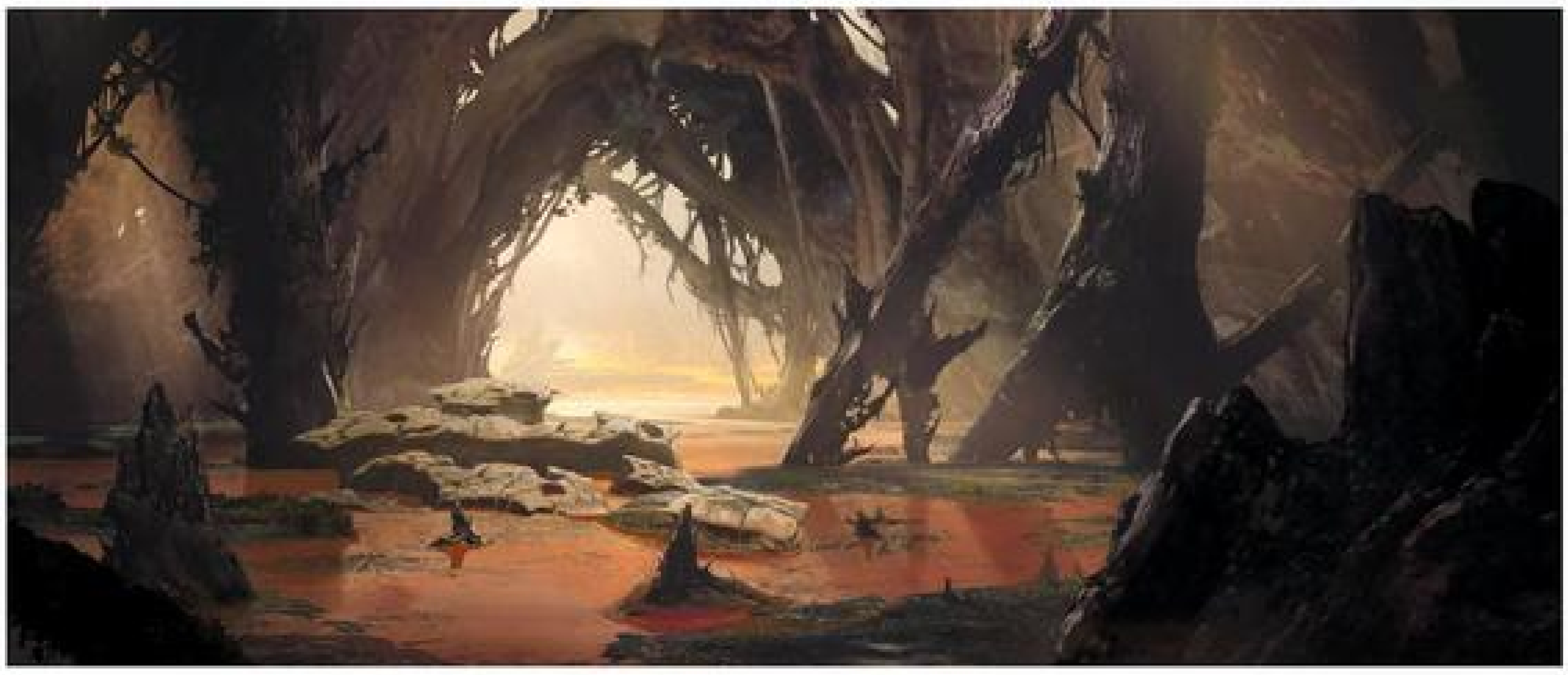


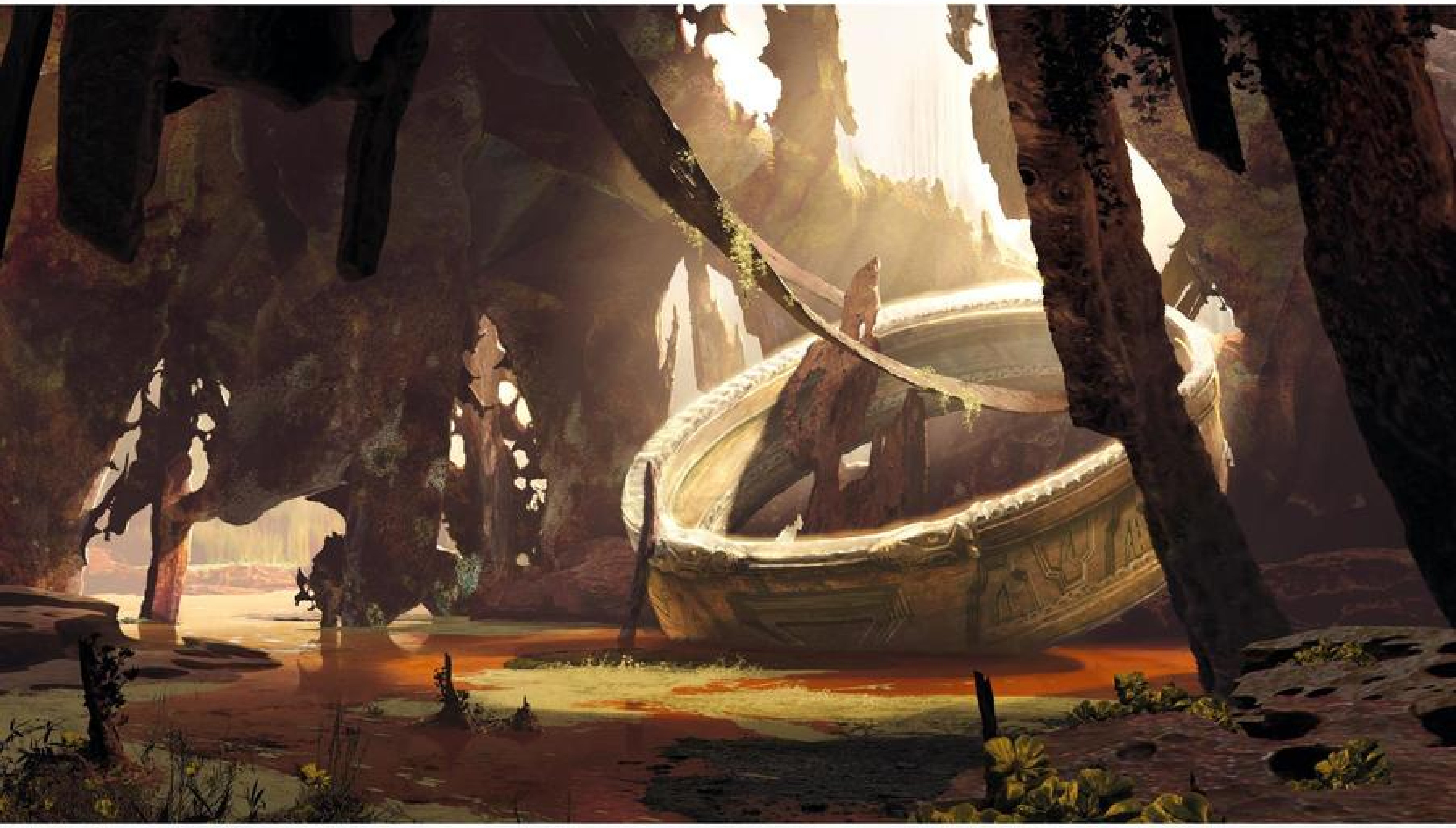
Brutish Hel-Walker concepts. Artist: Shan Qiao

Ragnarök presents the opportunity to explore new corners of the realms established in the 2018 game. Kratos and Atreus visited the soaring peaks of the Giant's Fingers, but here, the artists seized the opportunity to flesh out a lowland region of Jötunheim: Ironwood.

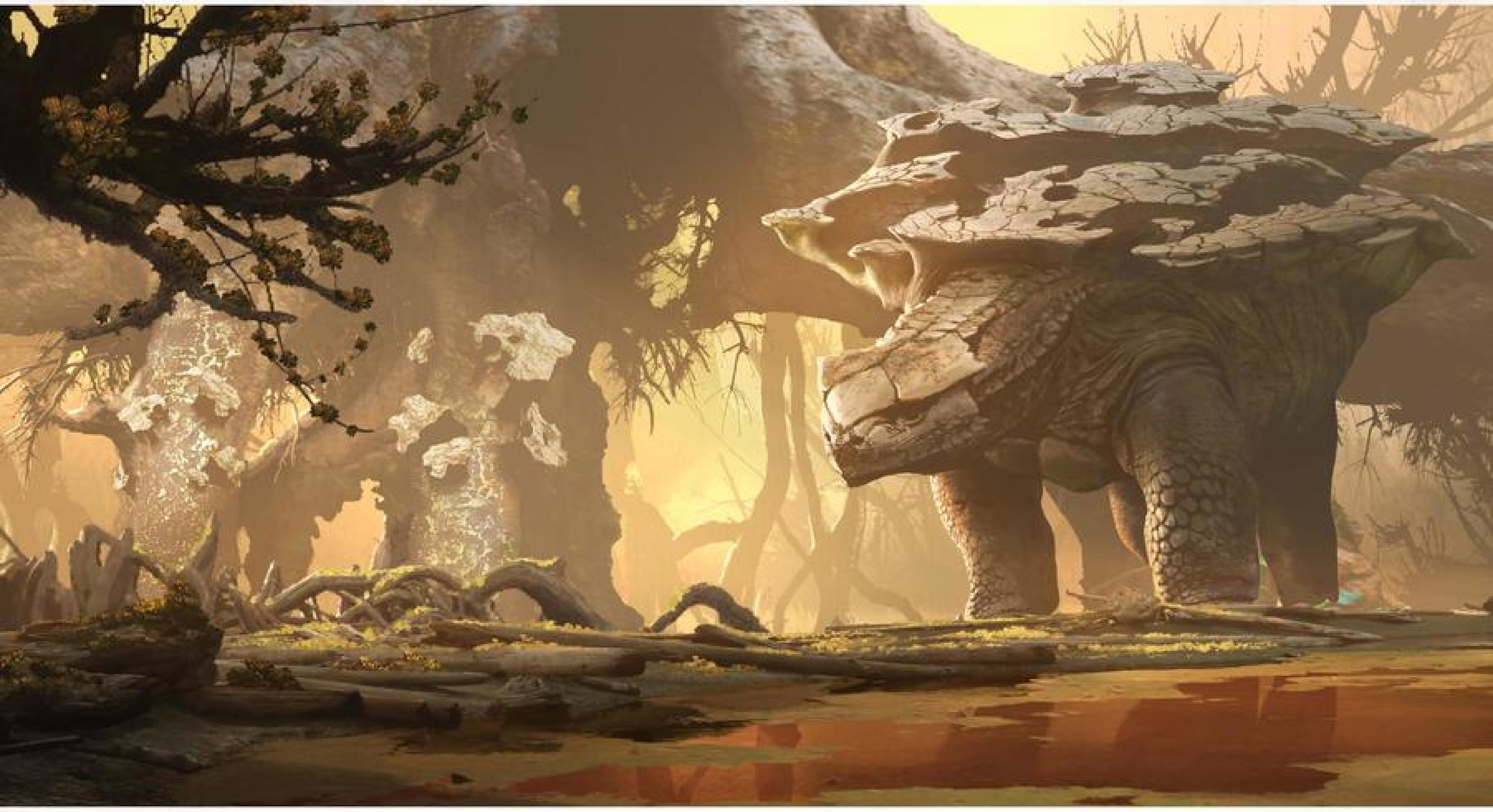
Castanon said, "We wanted Ironwood to have the look and feel of an '80s fantasy film—a place with its own grandeur and mystery. We pushed for a more forested marshland area laced with petrified metal trees, warm rusty waters, and new species of plants we had never seen before in the nine realms. I explored moments of large fallen artifacts left behind by the giants that were lost to time and had fun expressing any unique fauna this area could have."

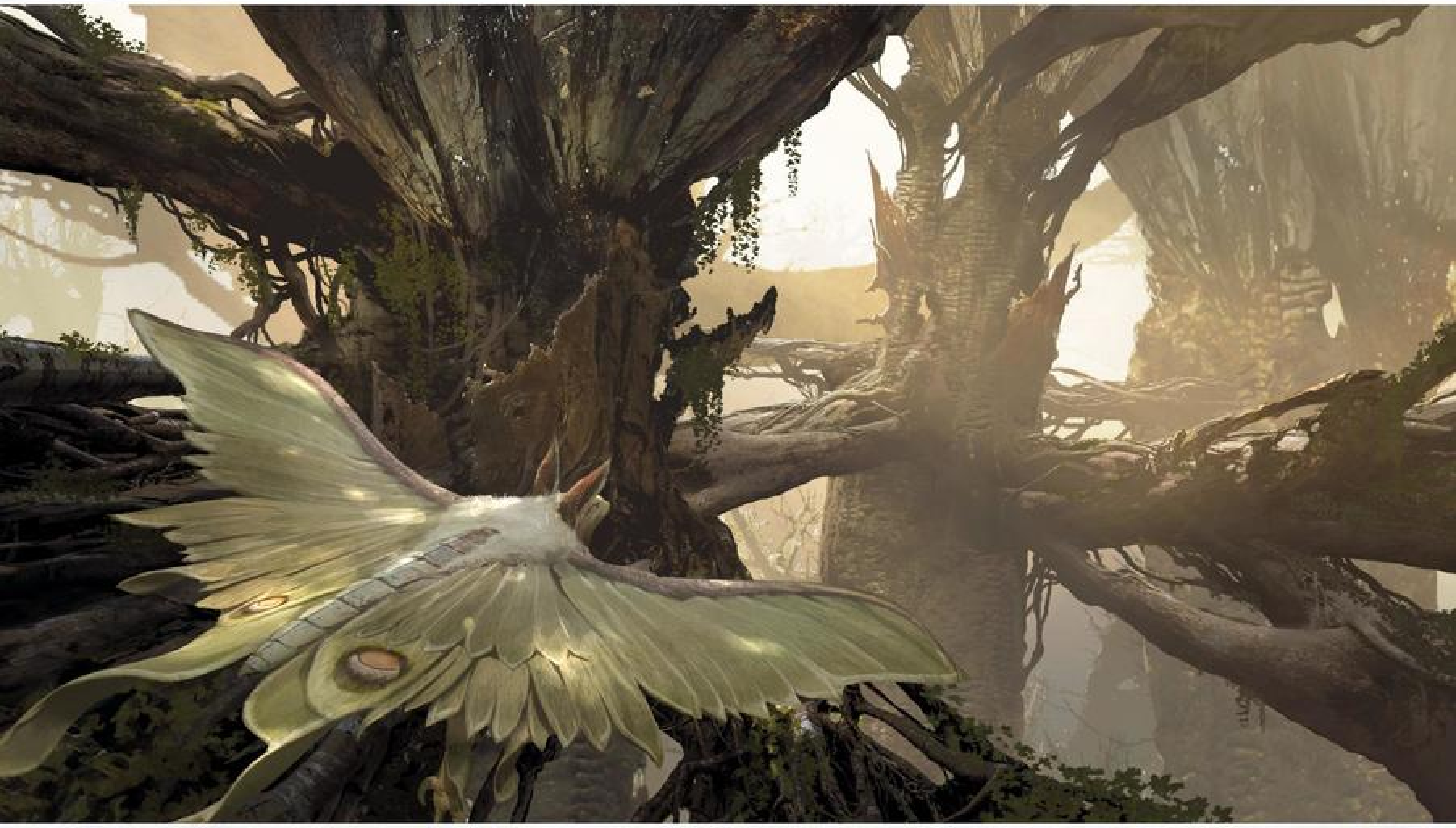






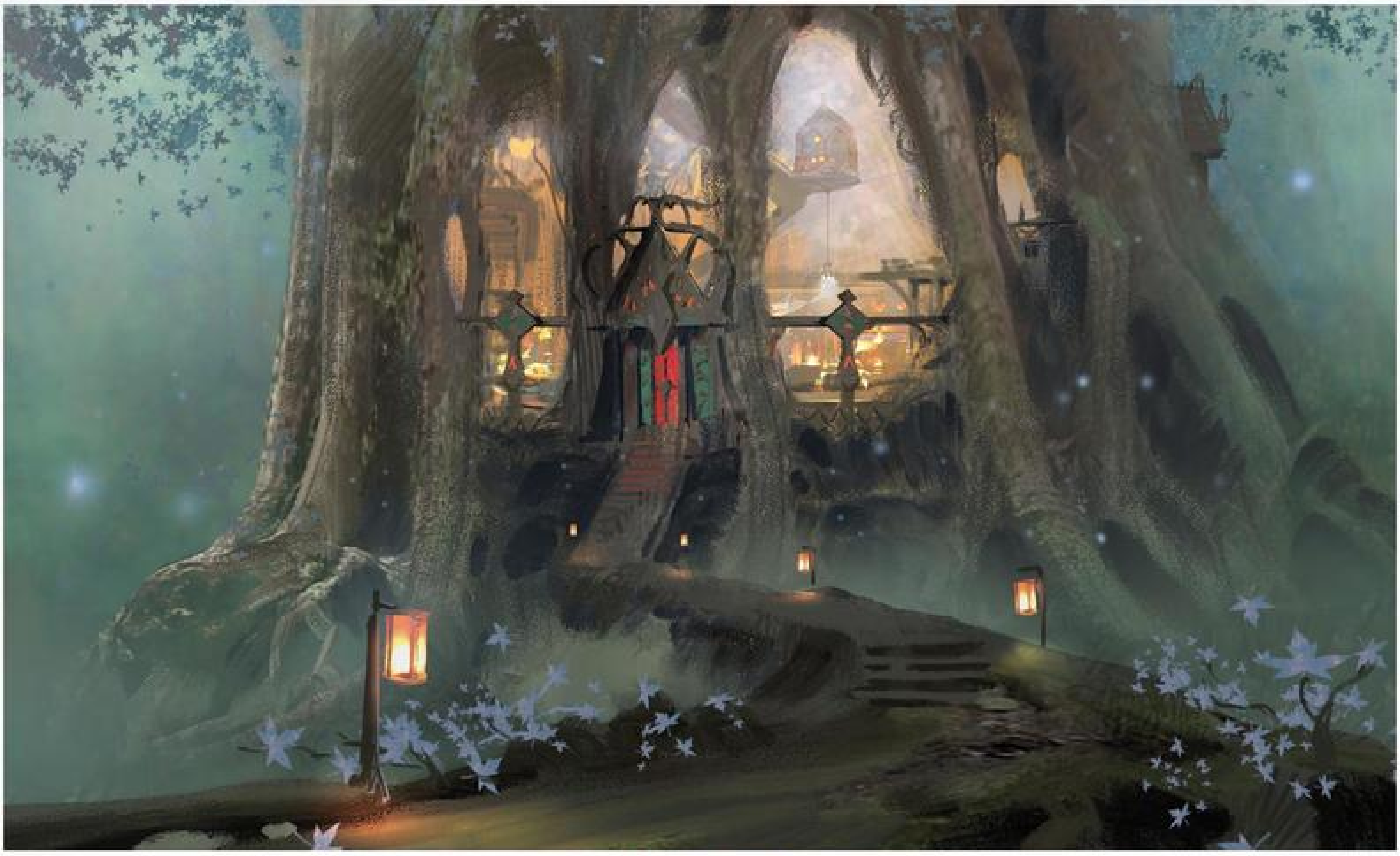
A giant's artifact. Artist: Mark Castanon

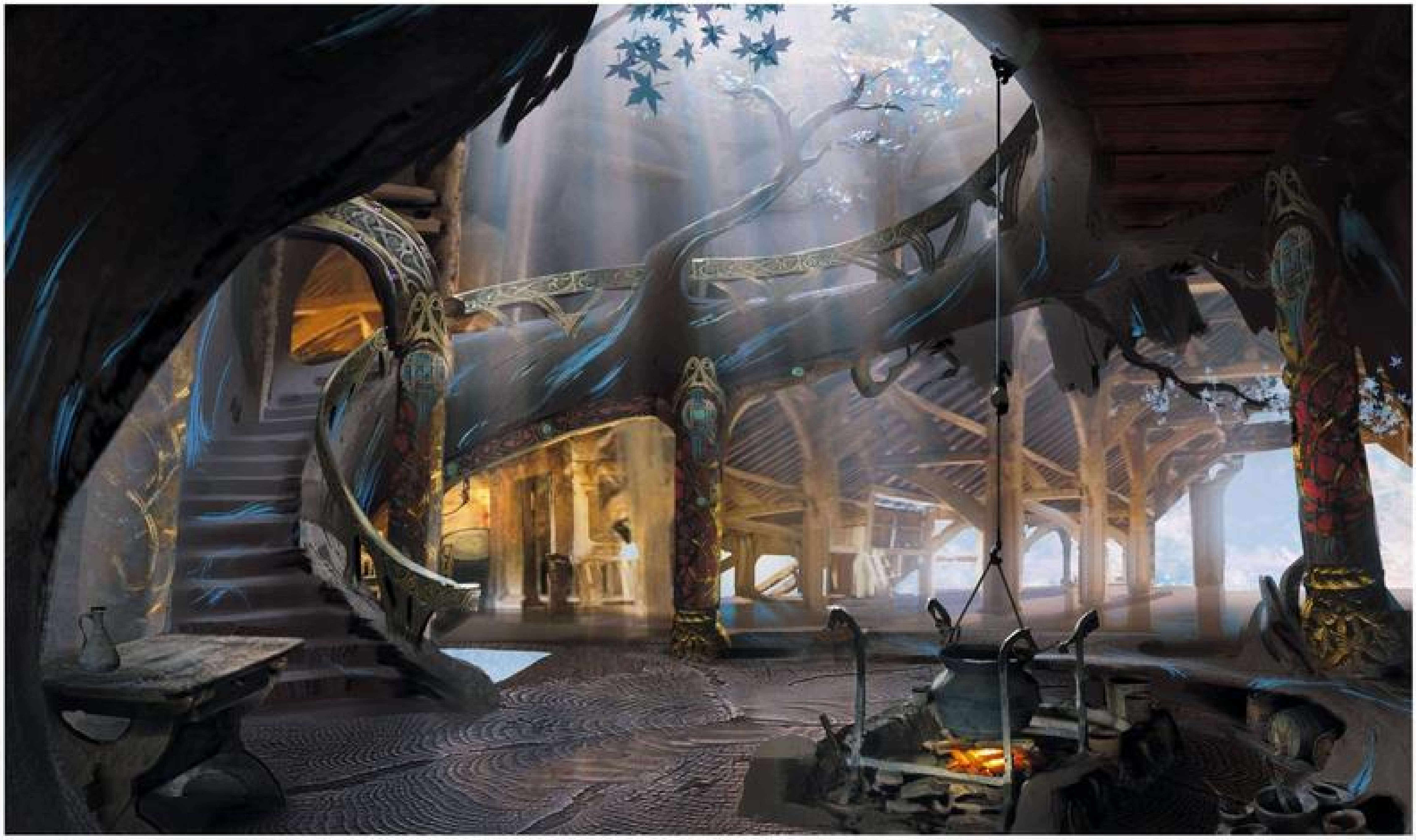




Ironwood creature concepts. Artist: Mark Castanon

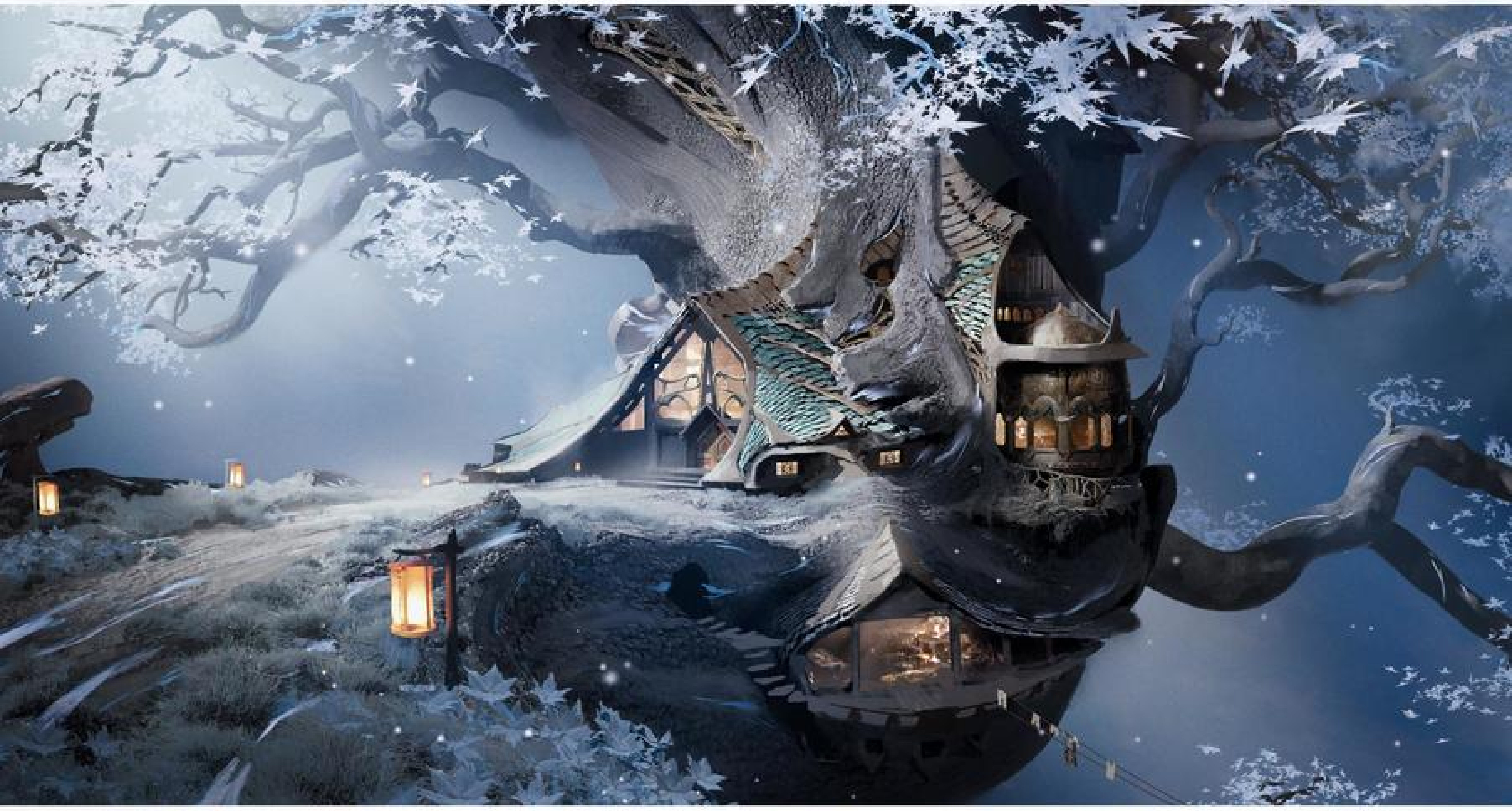
Abodes in the Realm between Realms. Artist: Luke Berliner

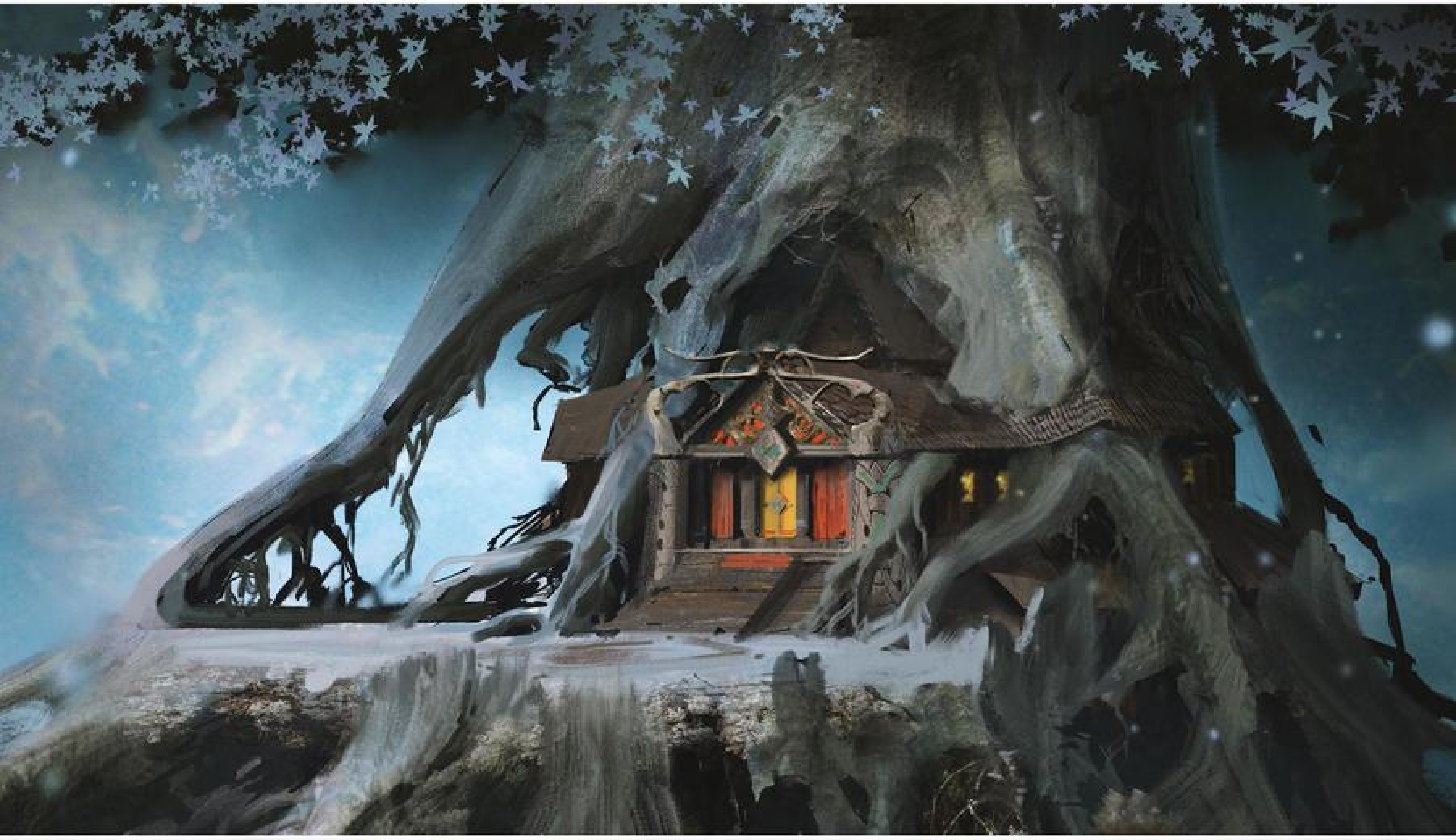




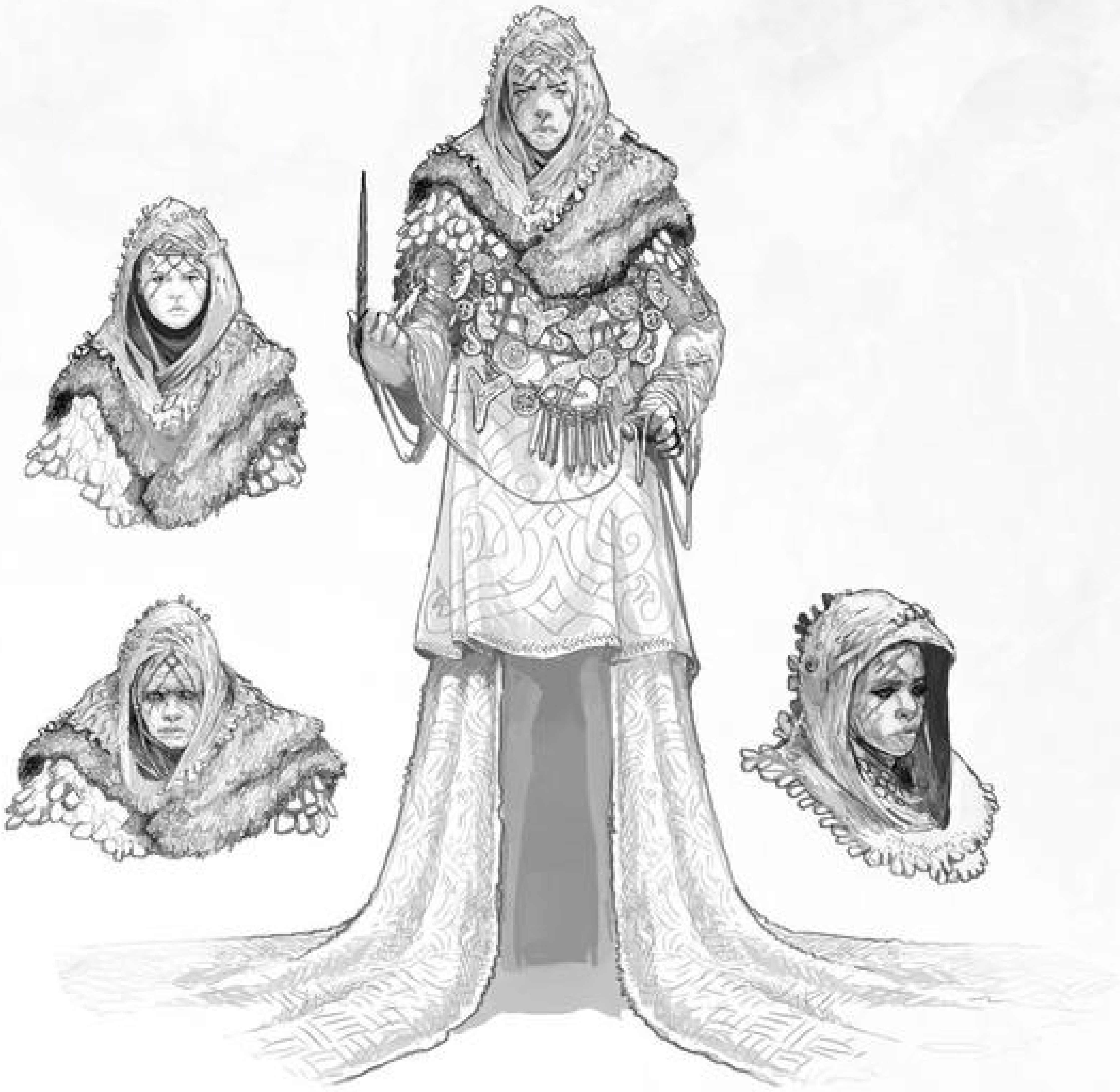
"I had been hoping to design a house like this for a long time," Berliner said. "The more we heard about Sindri's house in the Realm between Realms, the more excited we all got. The upper-right design captured everyone's imagination. It's rare to lock in to a design so quickly—normally we go through a long iteration process—but this was a lucky moment."

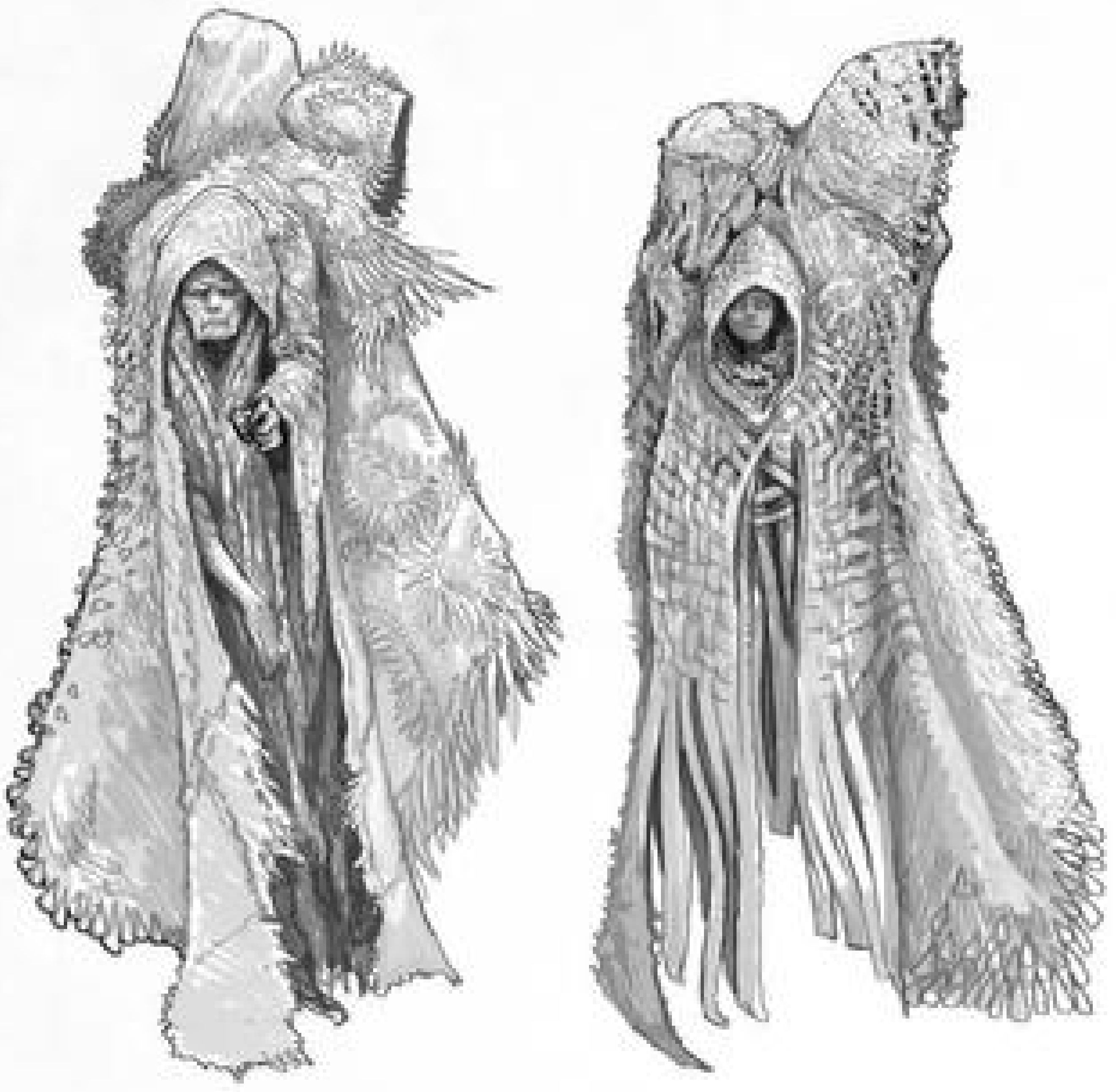
Sindri's house concept. Artist: Luke Berliner

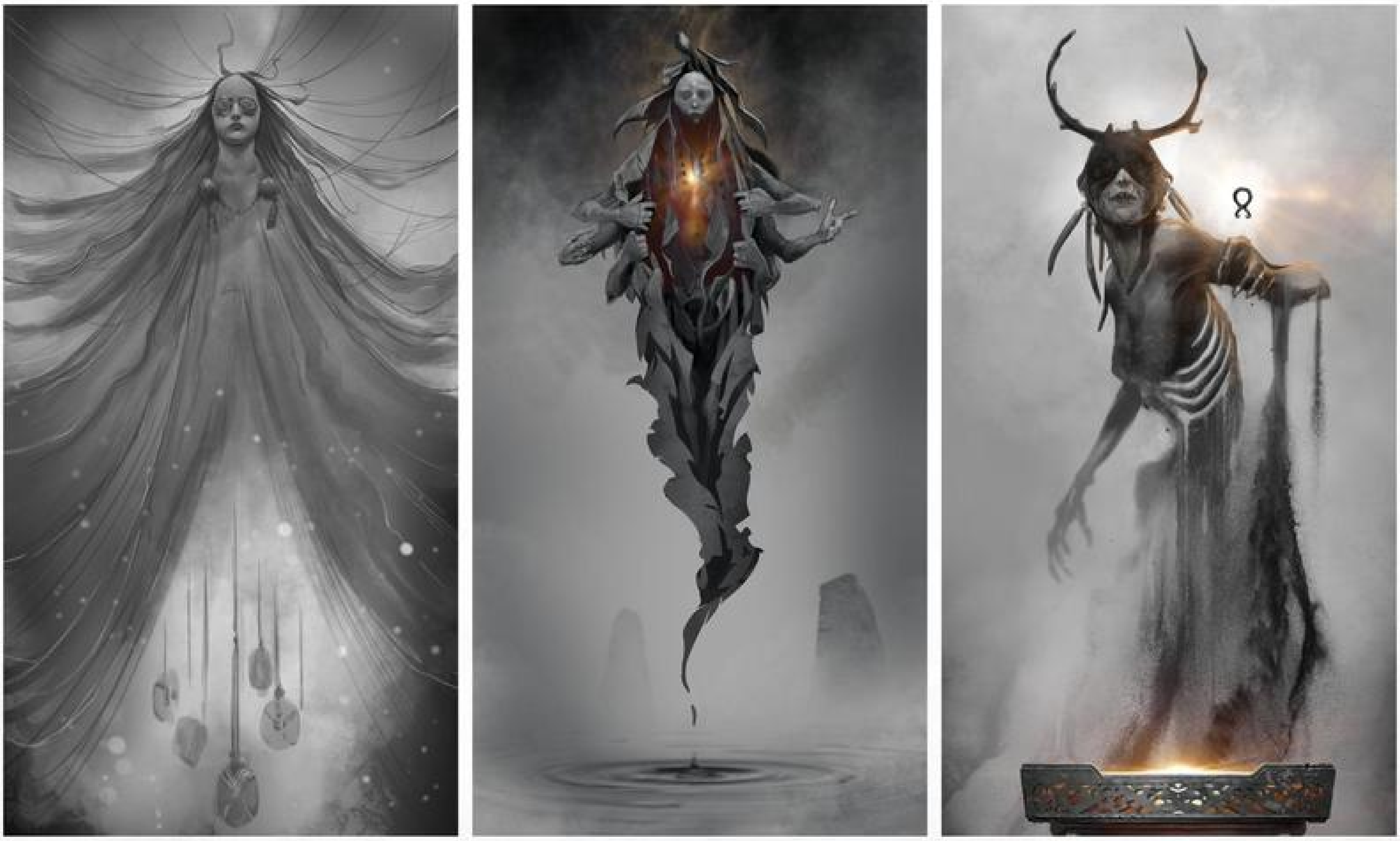




Going back to his time in Greece, Kratos has always contended with the question of fate versus free will. *Ragnarök* introduces the Nornir, the three Norse sisters of fate. Longfish said, "Themes of past, present, and future ran through their look, even from the very first designs with versions of them spanning from young, almost childlike, characters to extremely old. We also wanted to push the fantasy feel to this trio."

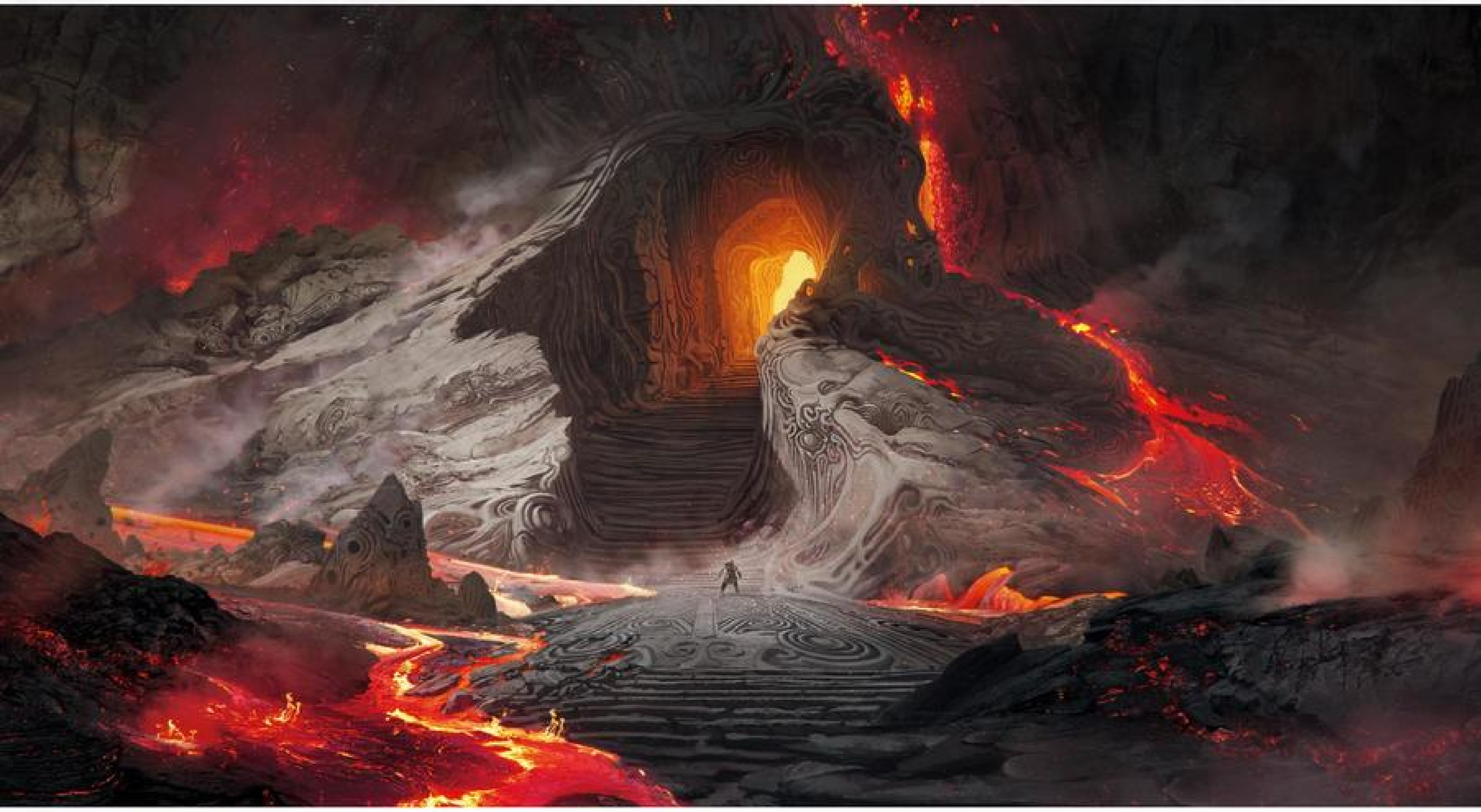


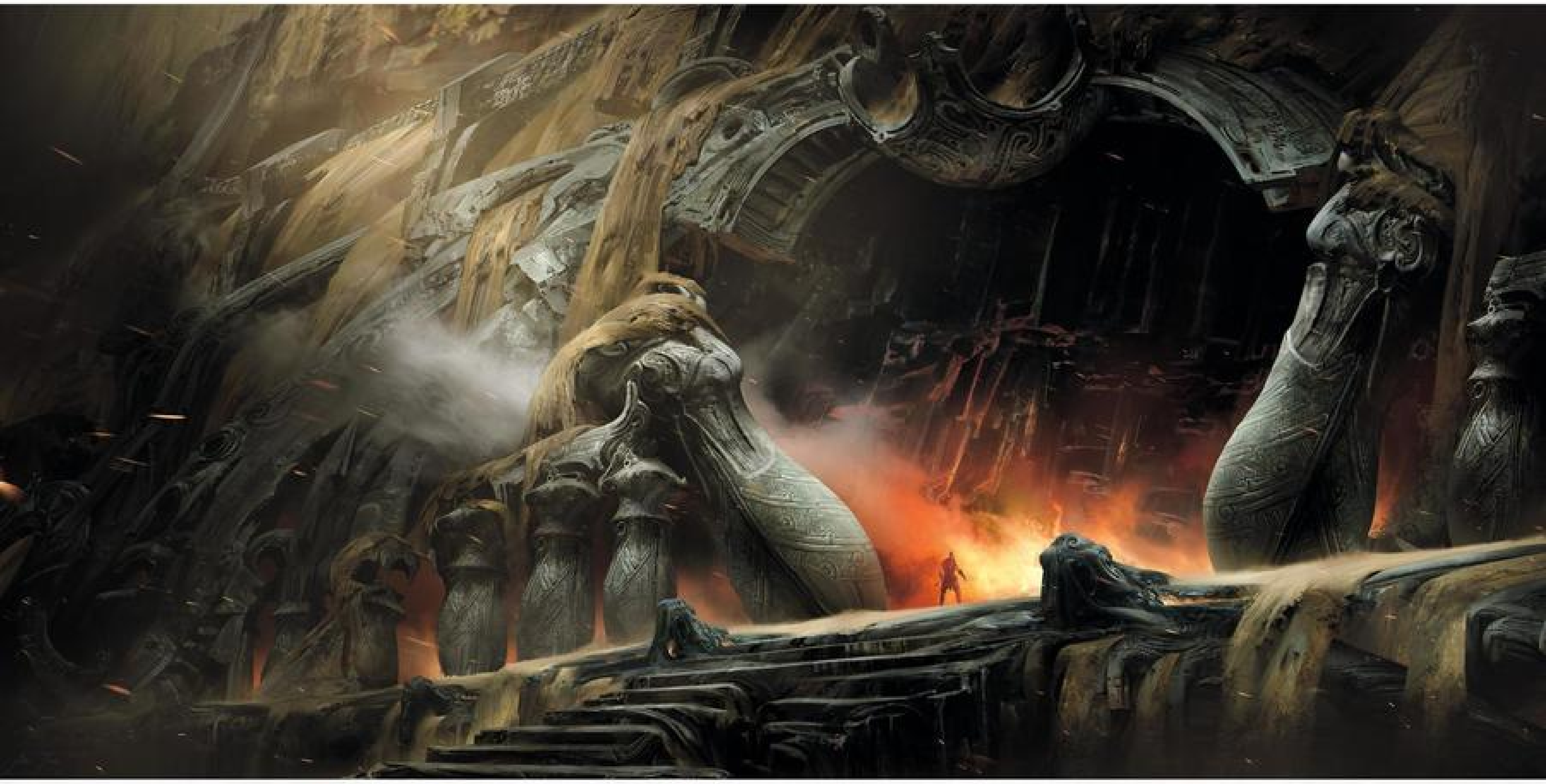




The sisters of fate. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Dela Longfish (bottom and opposite)

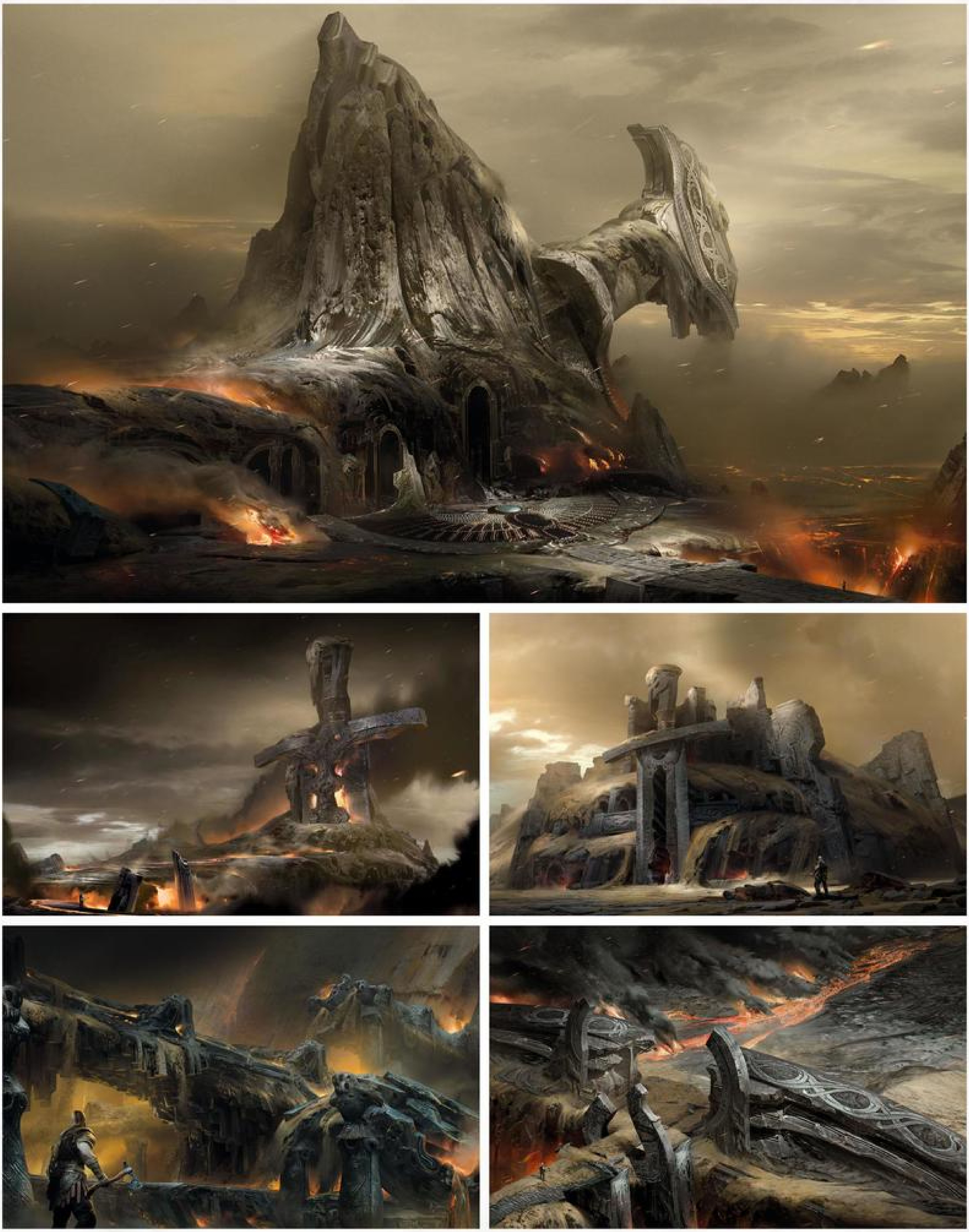
Muspelheim's caverns. Artists: Matteo Marjoram (top); Abe Taraky (bottom)



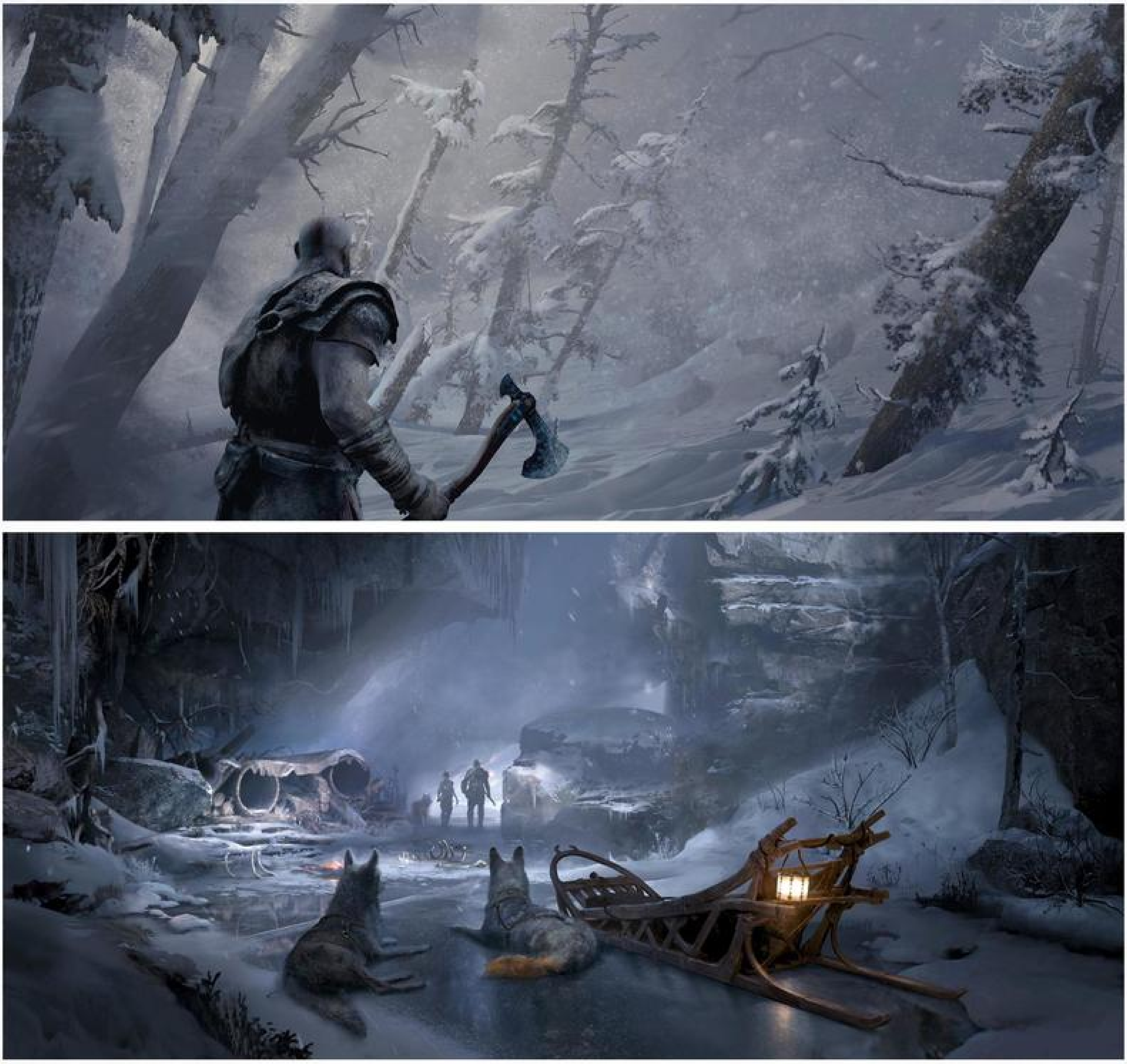


With entrances worn down and pitted by the lava's heat, Muspelheim's caverns have a daunting appearance. As with each area in the game—regardless of how much time a player will spend there—the artists carefully considered the design. "We want the whole game to look spectacular across the board and be very interesting. You want side quests and content that's cool, not just repetitive," lead of external development John Palamarchuk said.

Fire giant artifacts. Artist: Abe Taraky



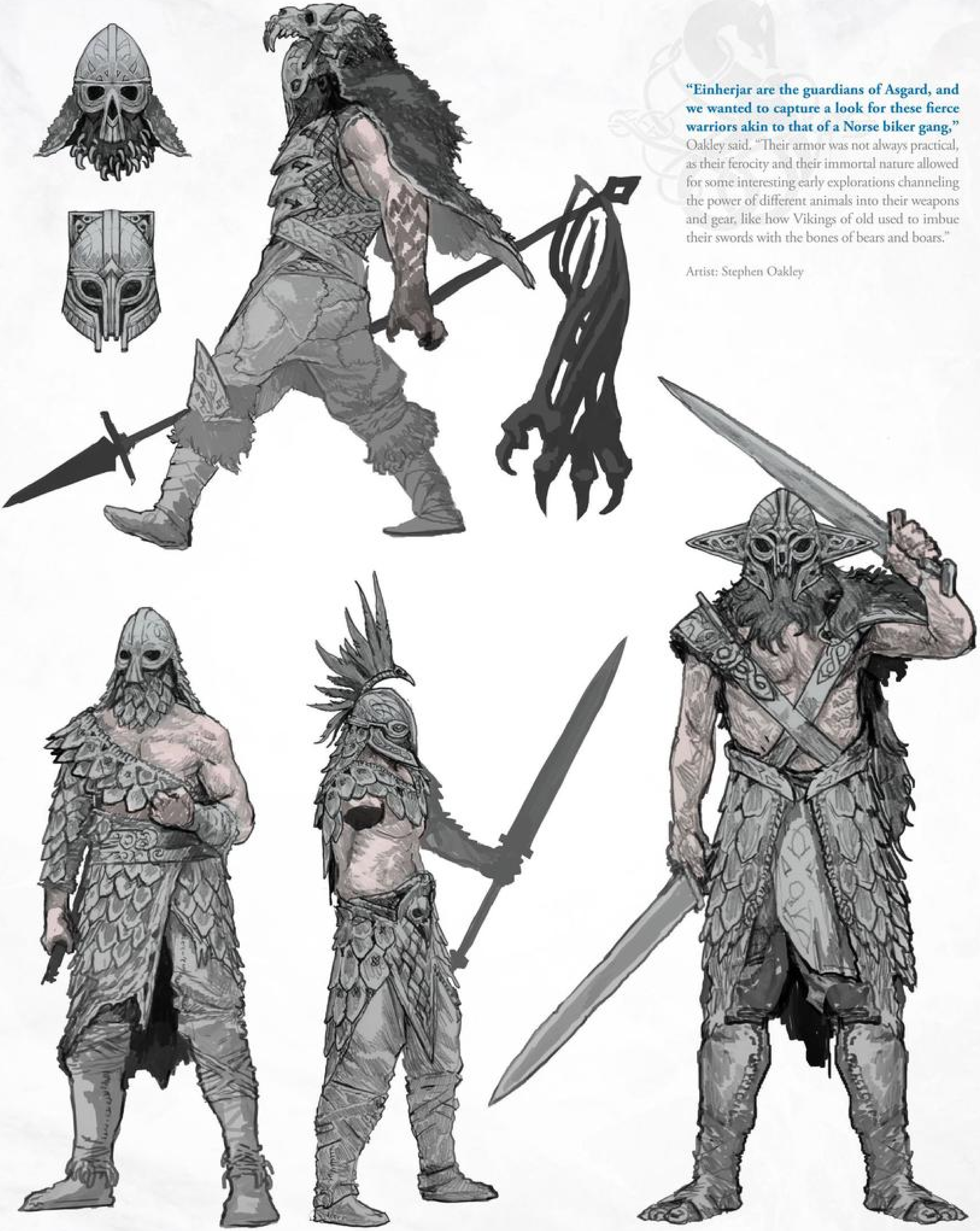
Concepts for snow coverage in Midgard. Artist: Mark Castanon, West Studio

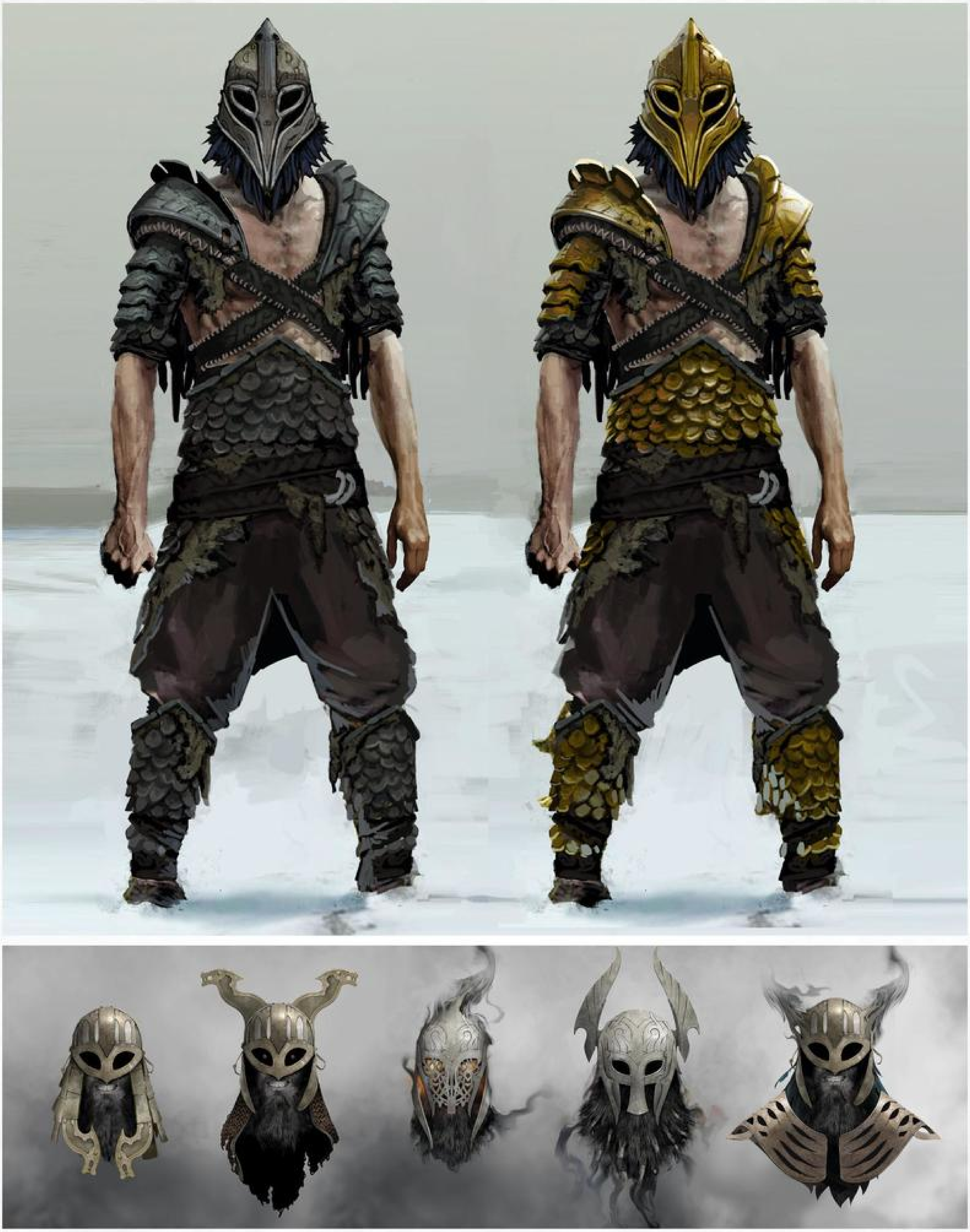


"In the last game, we had to find ways to make the snowy environment and the long time spent in Midgard interesting for the player," Grassetti said. "In this one, with Midgard being fully covered in snow, we really want to have contrast between the different realms so that you want to get out there and explore."

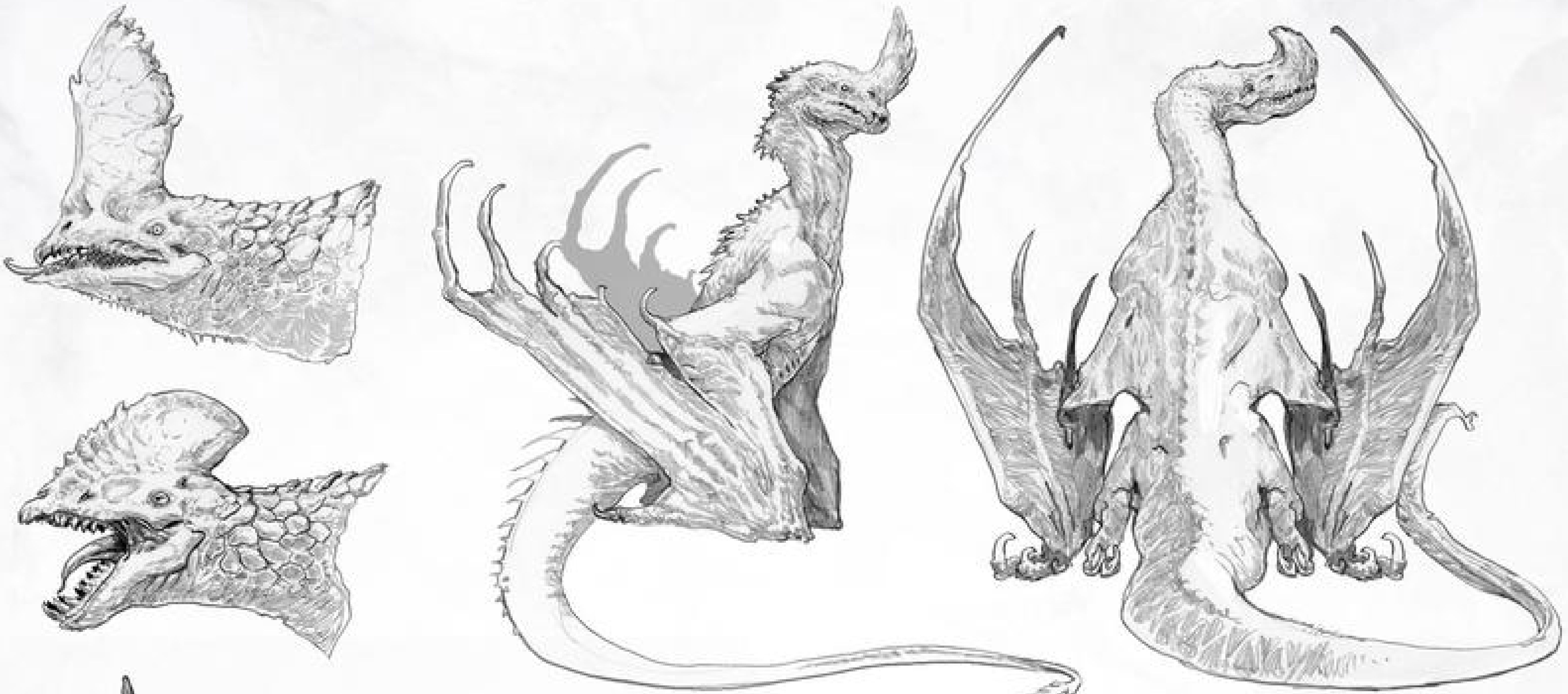
"Einherjar are the guardians of Asgard, and we wanted to capture a look for these fierce warriors akin to that of a Norse biker gang," Oakley said. "Their armor was not always practical, as their ferocity and their immortal nature allowed for some interesting early explorations channeling the power of different animals into their weapons and gear, like how Vikings of old used to imbue their swords with the bones of bears and boars."

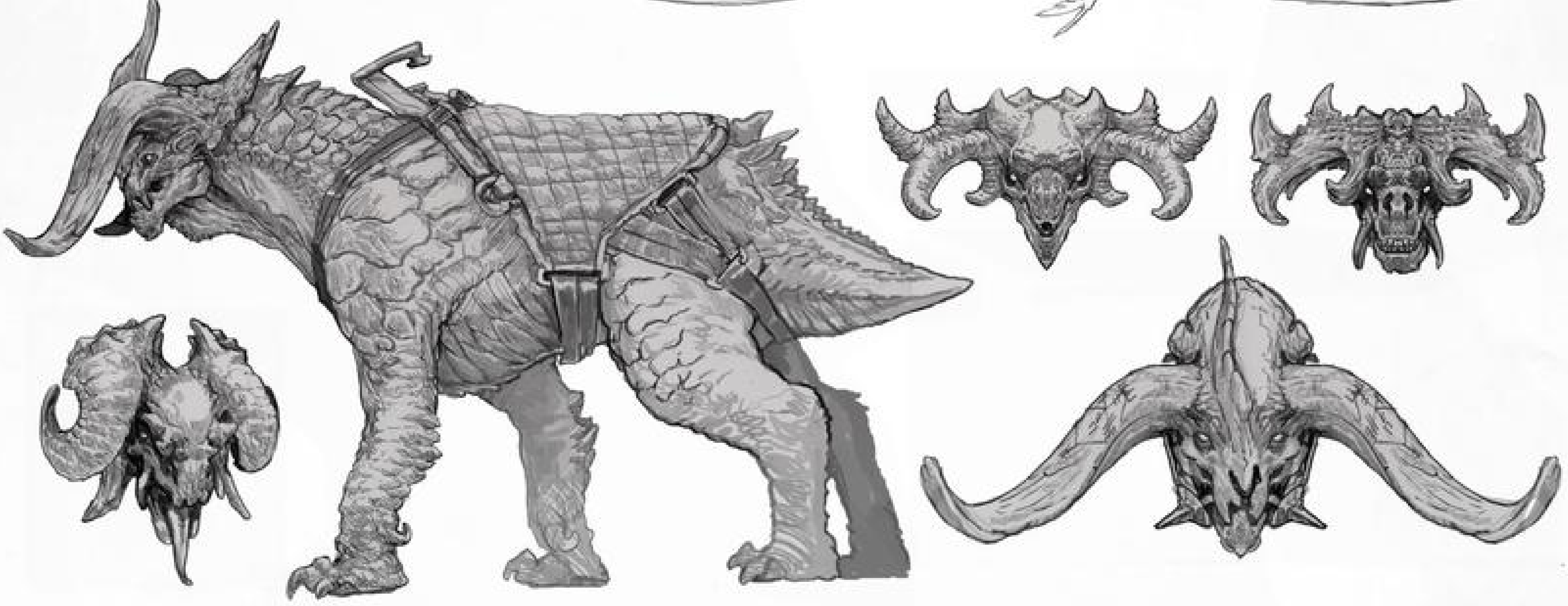
Artist: Stephen Oakley

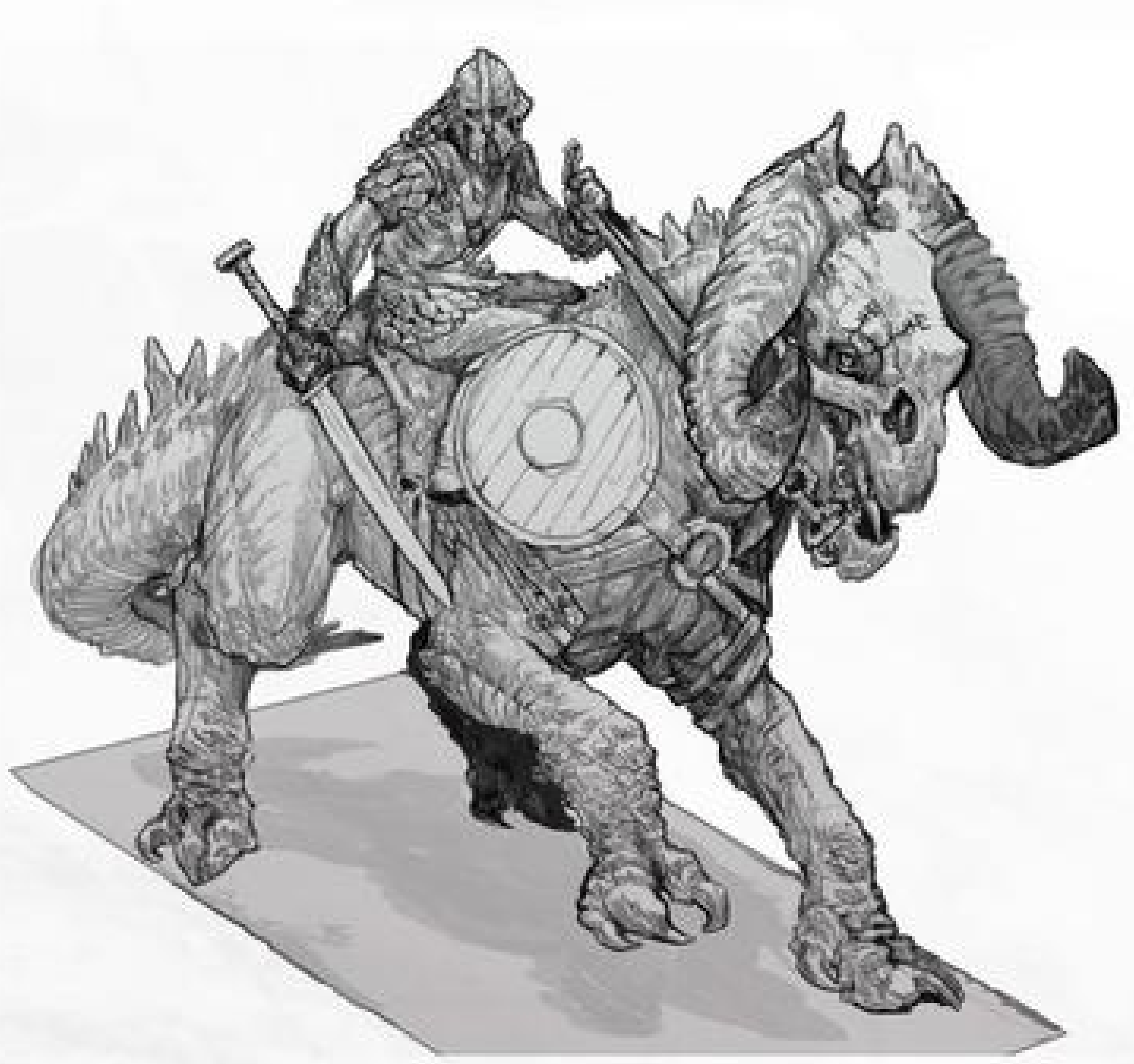


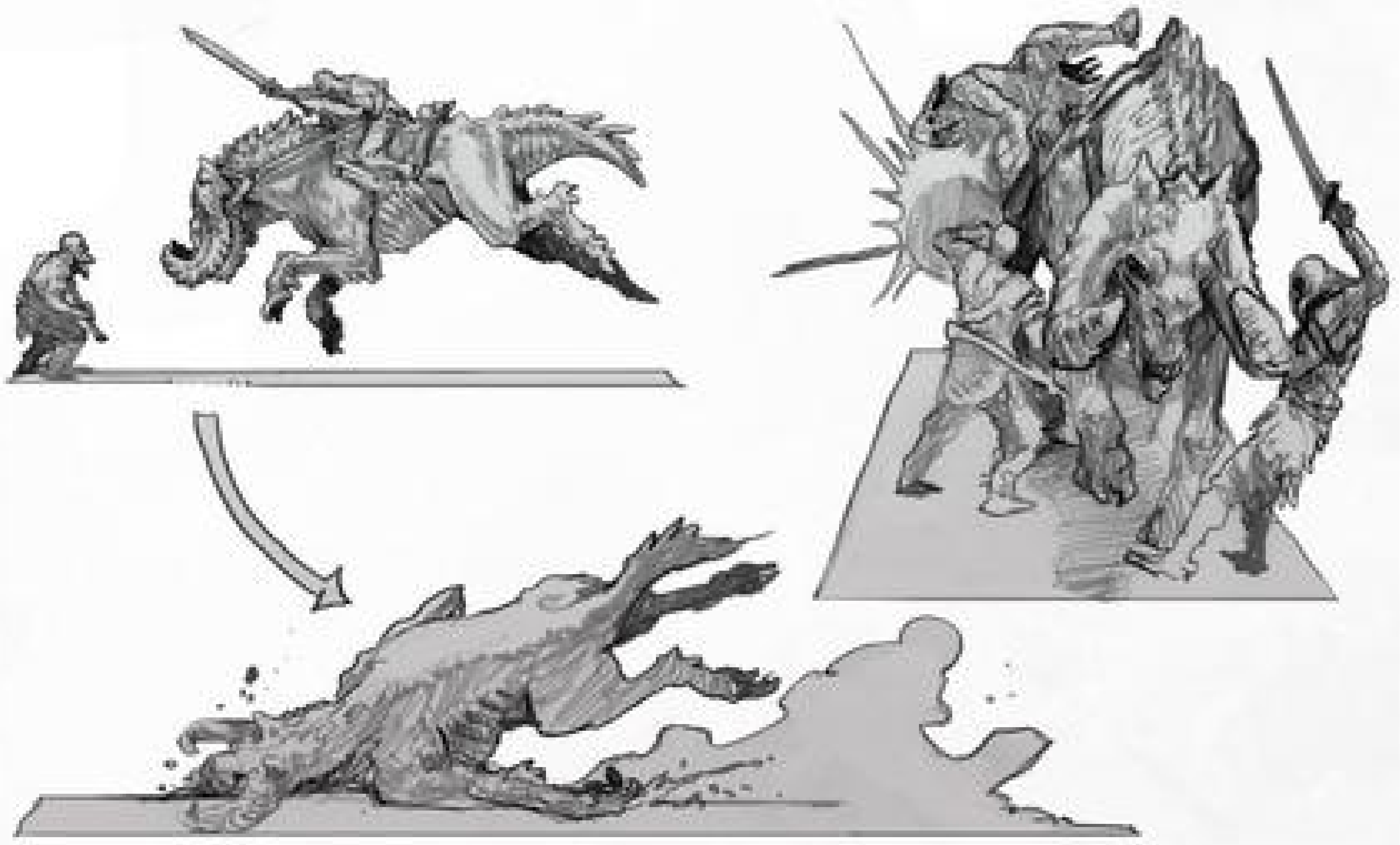


Helm concepts for the Einherjar. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Dela Longfish (bottom)







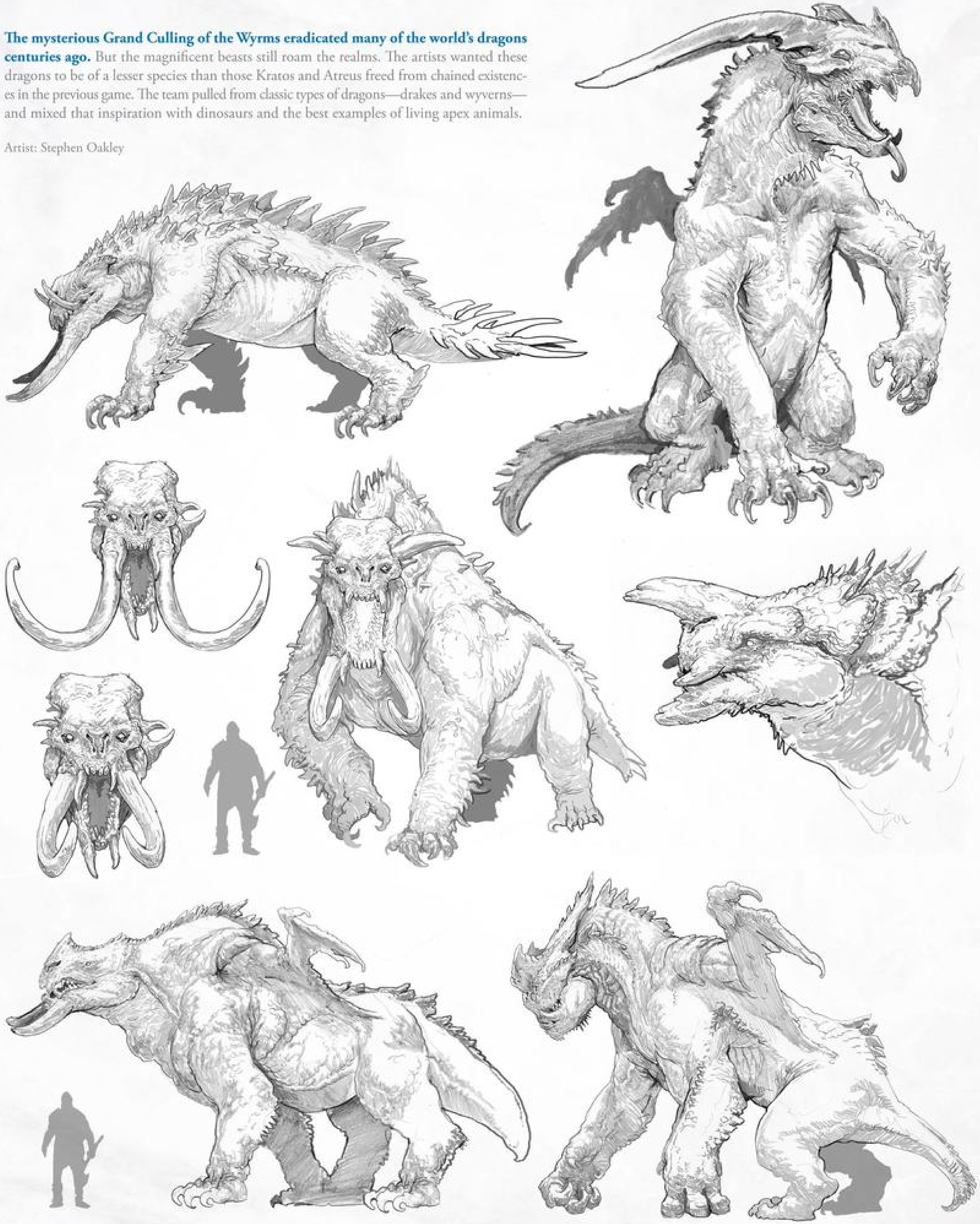


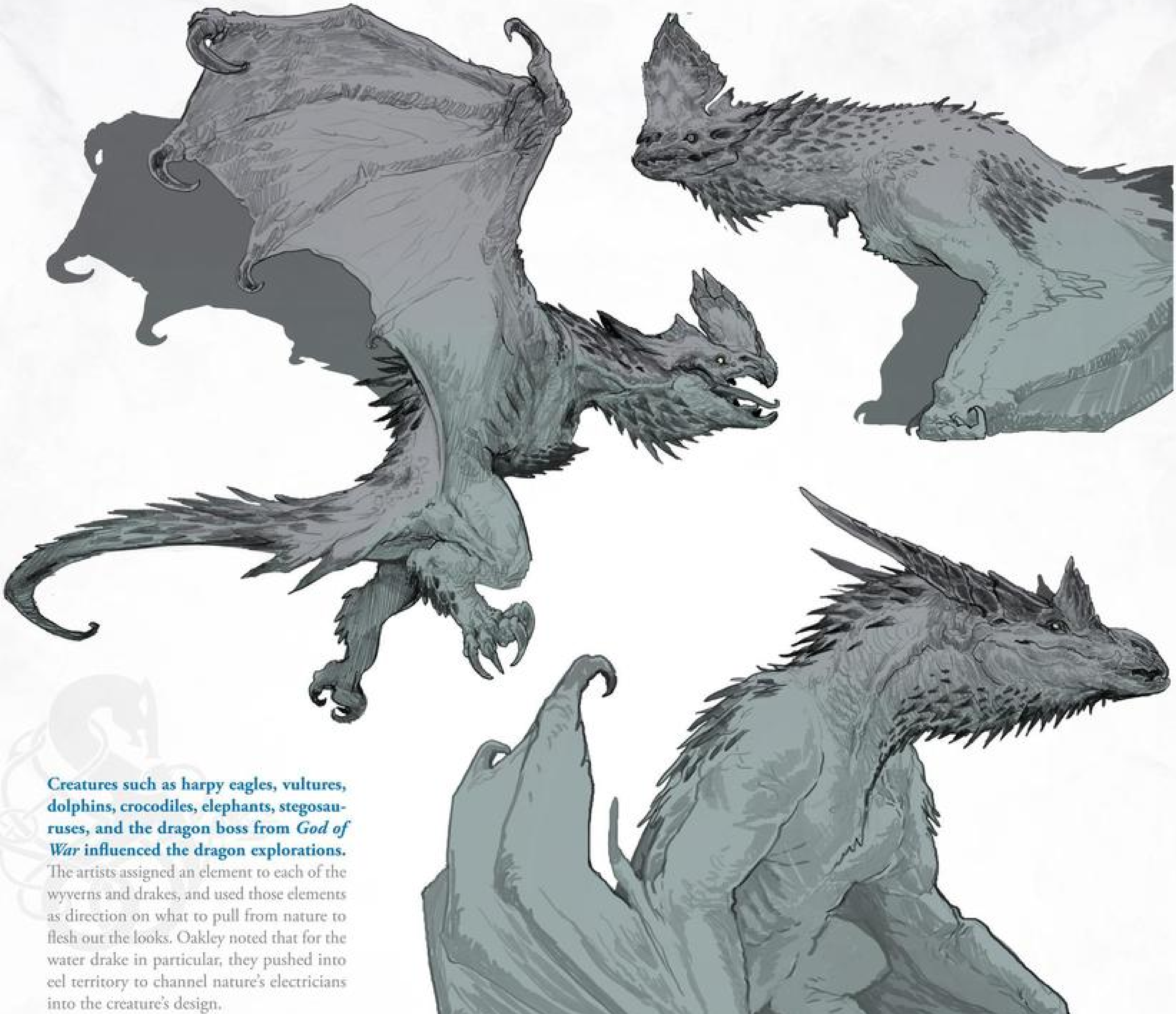
The Einherjar wyverns were meant to give the warriors a kind of air power. With true dragons being too powerful and intelligent, the Einherjar would find the more feral wyverns to be proper beasts of war, as well as drakes—ox-like, wingless dragon mounts. These ideas eventually became the realm glider and realm runner in the game.

Artist: Stephen Oakley

The mysterious Grand Culling of the Wyrms eradicated many of the world's dragons centuries ago. But the magnificent beasts still roam the realms. The artists wanted these dragons to be of a lesser species than those Kratos and Atreus freed from chained existences in the previous game. The team pulled from classic types of dragons—drakes and wyverns—and mixed that inspiration with dinosaurs and the best examples of living apex animals.

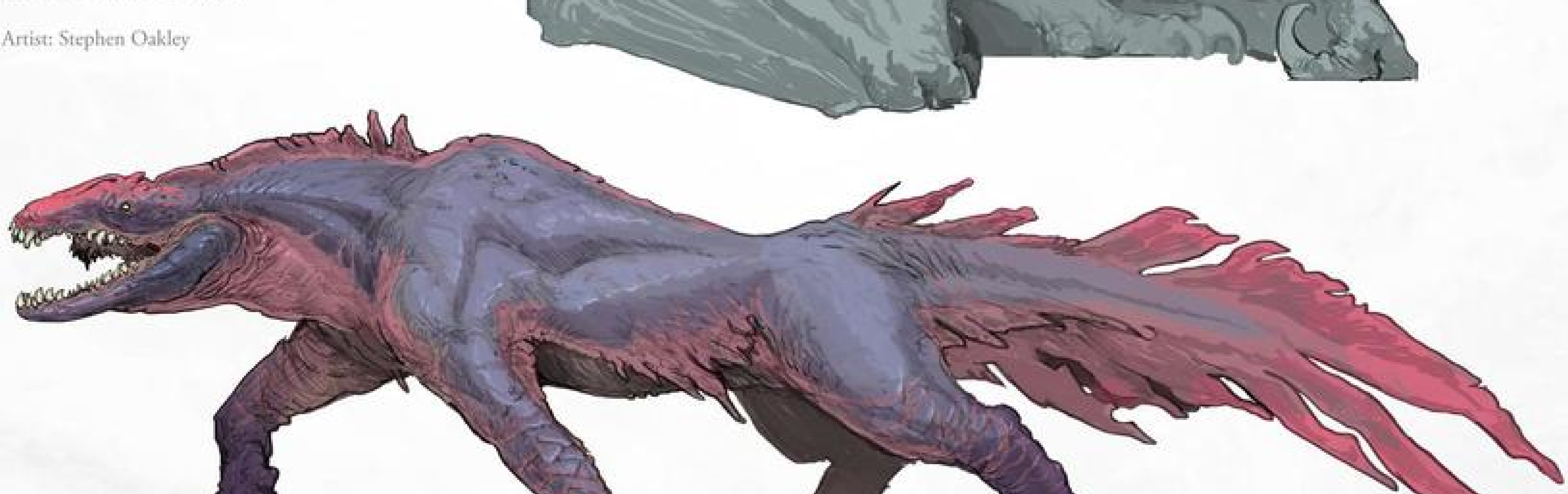
Artist: Stephen Oakley





Creatures such as harpy eagles, vultures, dolphins, crocodiles, elephants, stegosauruses, and the dragon boss from *God of War* influenced the dragon explorations. The artists assigned an element to each of the wyverns and drakes, and used those elements as direction on what to pull from nature to flesh out the looks. Oakley noted that for the water drake in particular, they pushed into eel territory to channel nature's electricians into the creature's design.

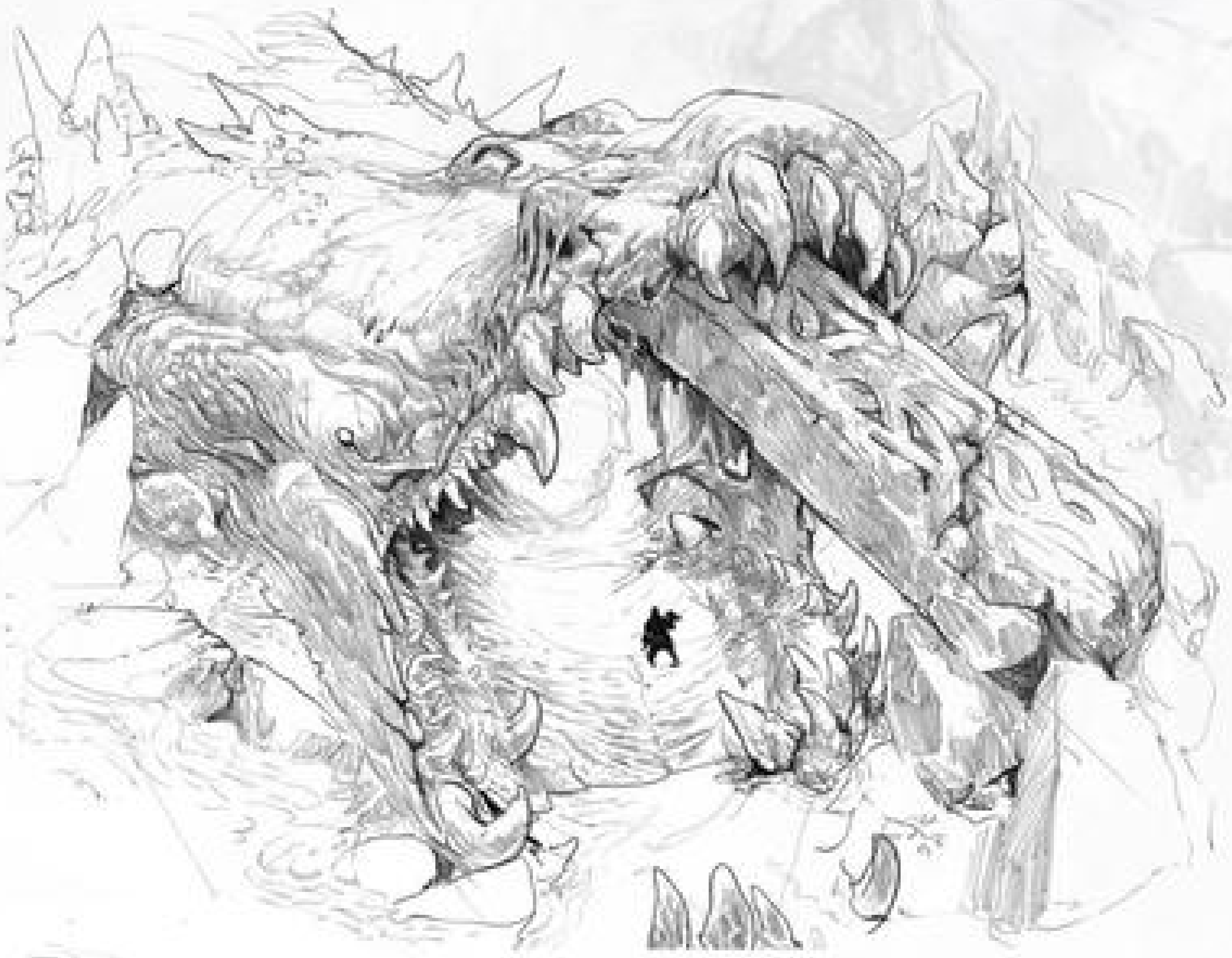
Artist: Stephen Oakley

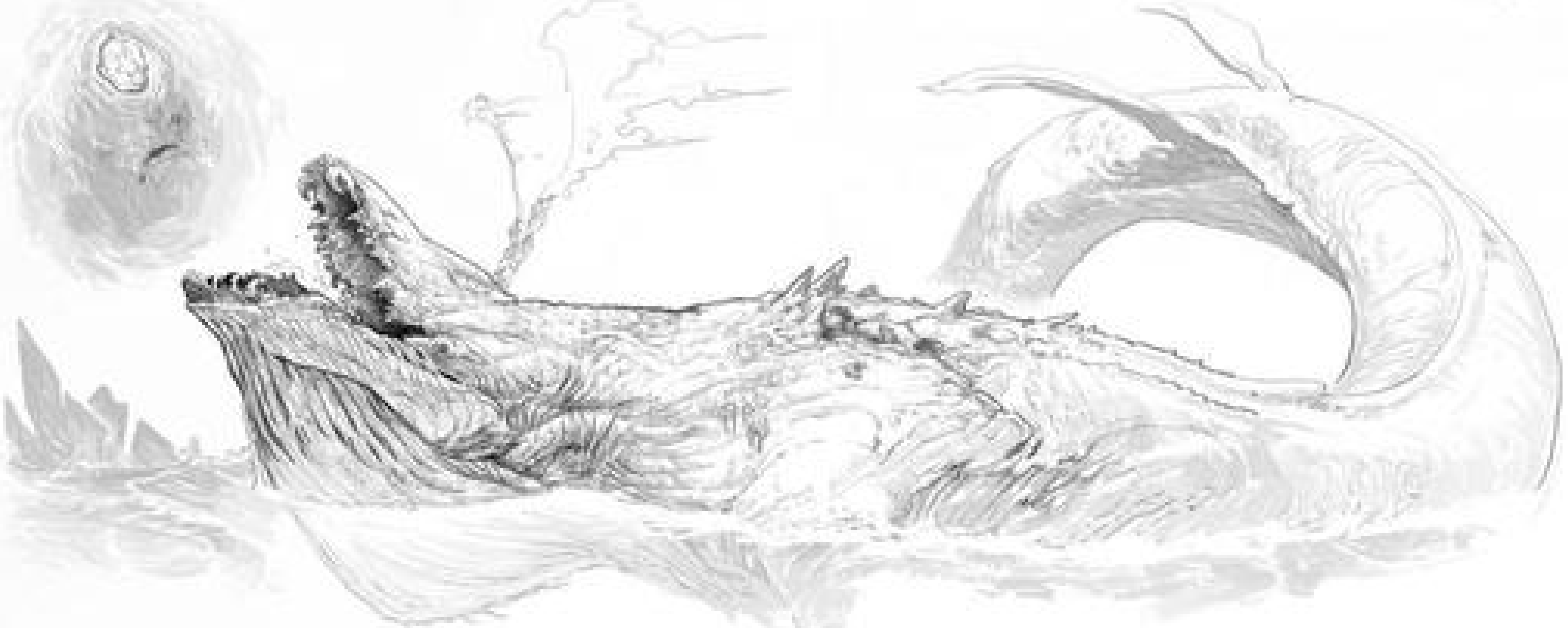


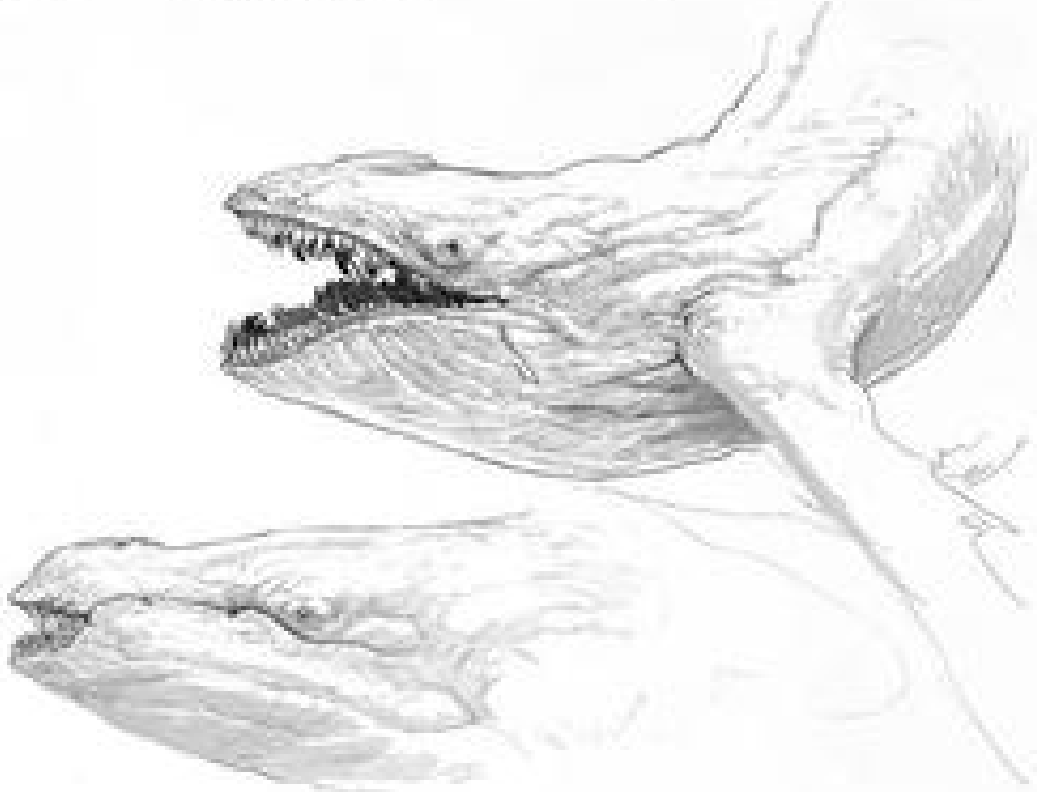
NIDHOGG

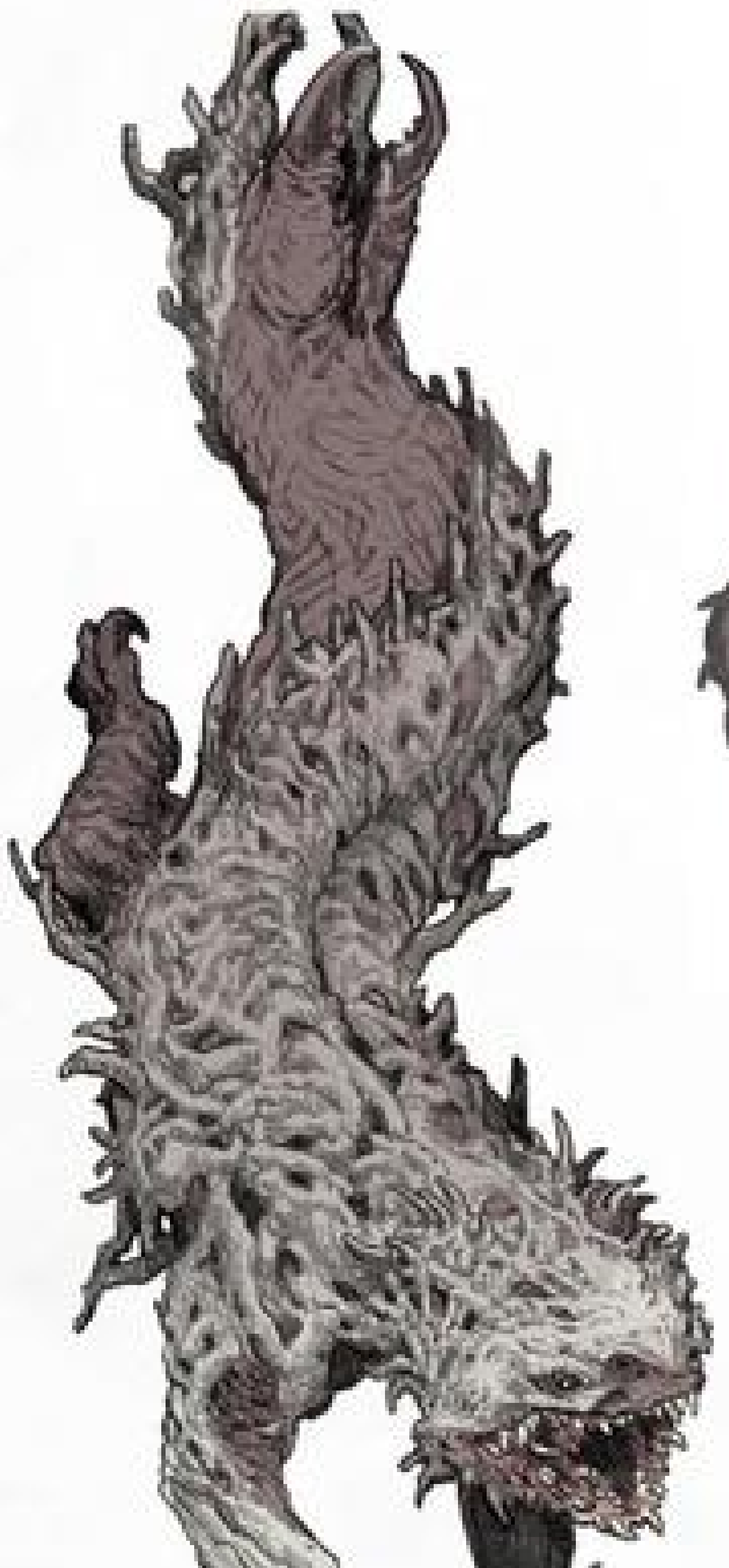
"Nidhogg, in legend, gnaws at the Yggdrasil's roots and is such a force to be reckoned with that the world tree quaked when the eagle and it got into conflicts," Oakley explained. "As such, early designs tried to incorporate the tree's roots, as well as what might live under the logs in our own world, like grubs and salamanders, or such immense entities as an ancient monstrous whale, which ended up being the base for Lyngbakr. The main thing that stuck out was the serpentine nature of this beast, which ended up becoming the driving force as this design slithered its way toward completion."

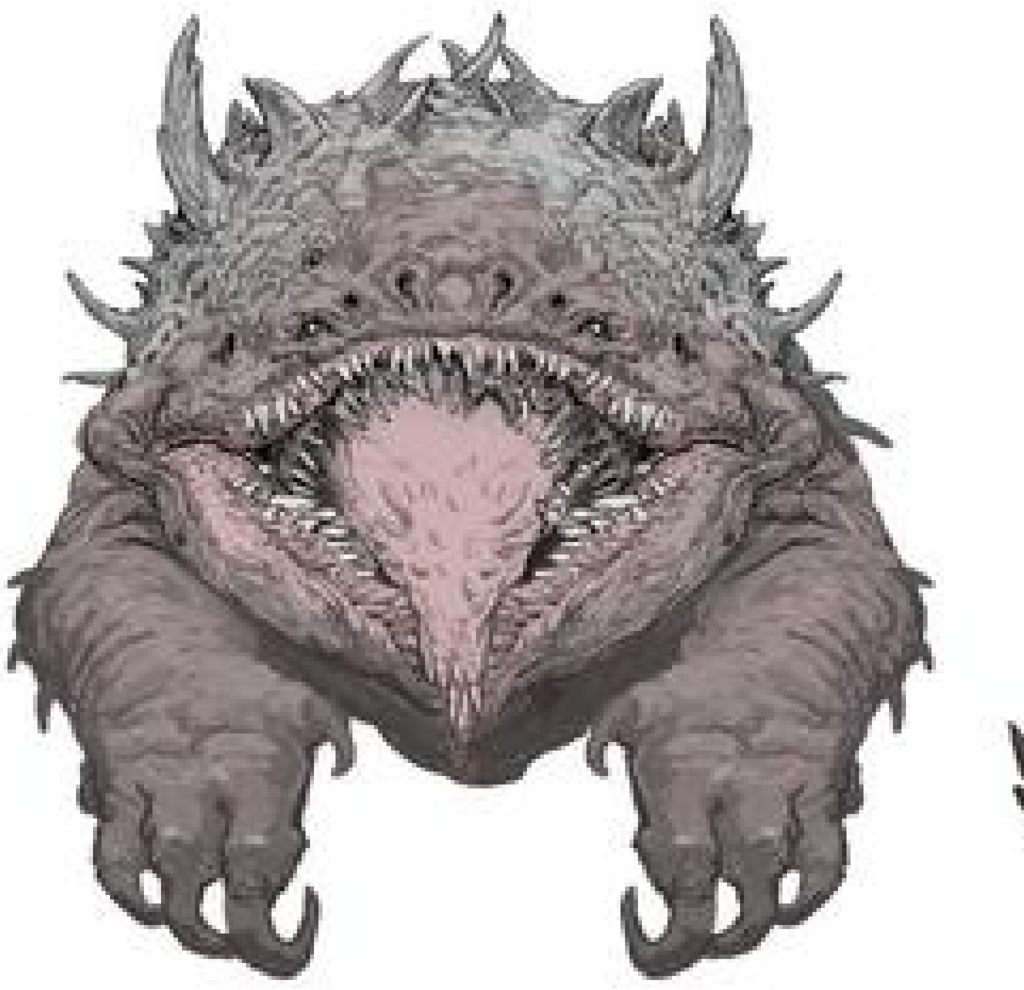
Artist: Stephen Oakley

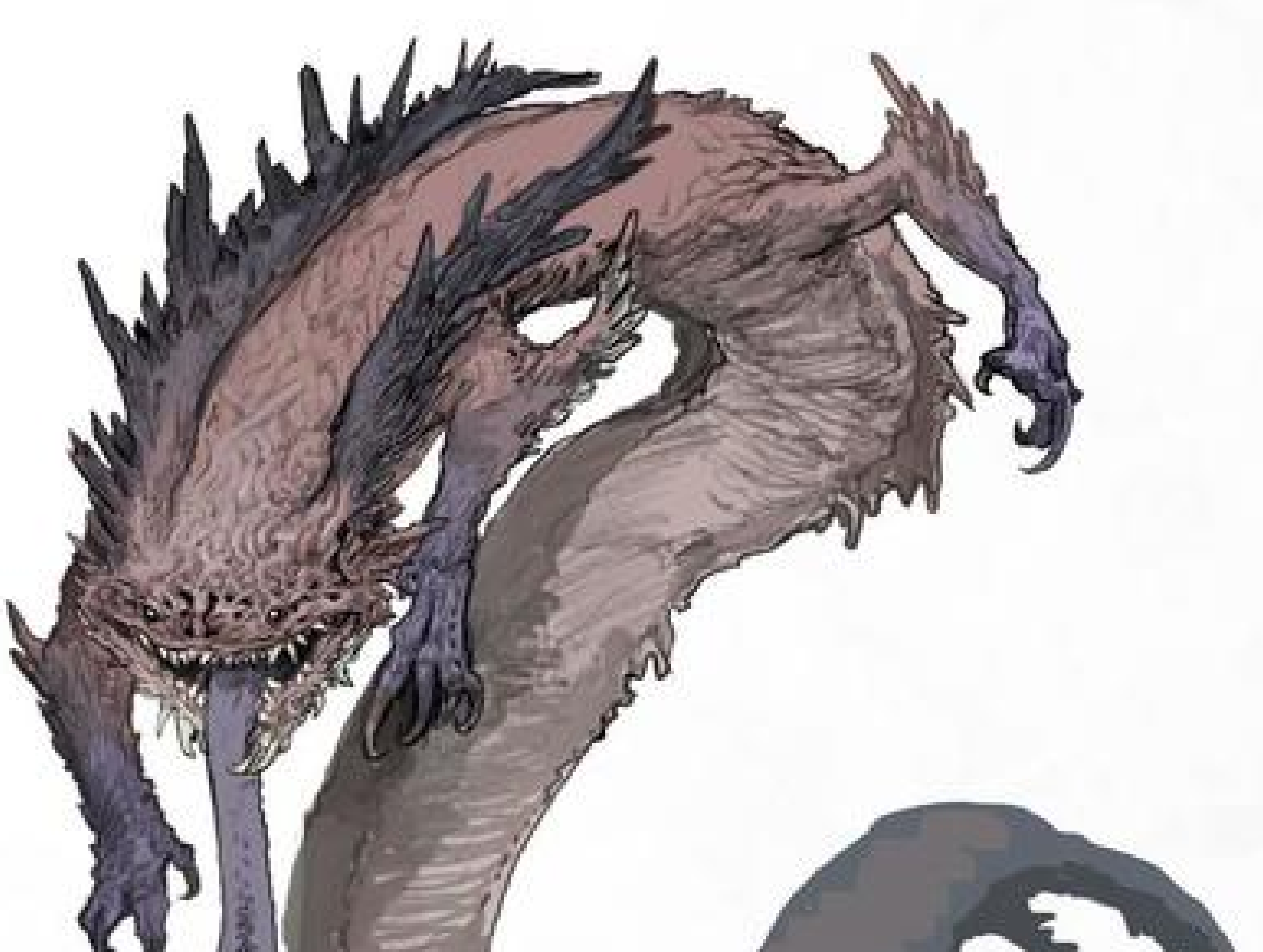


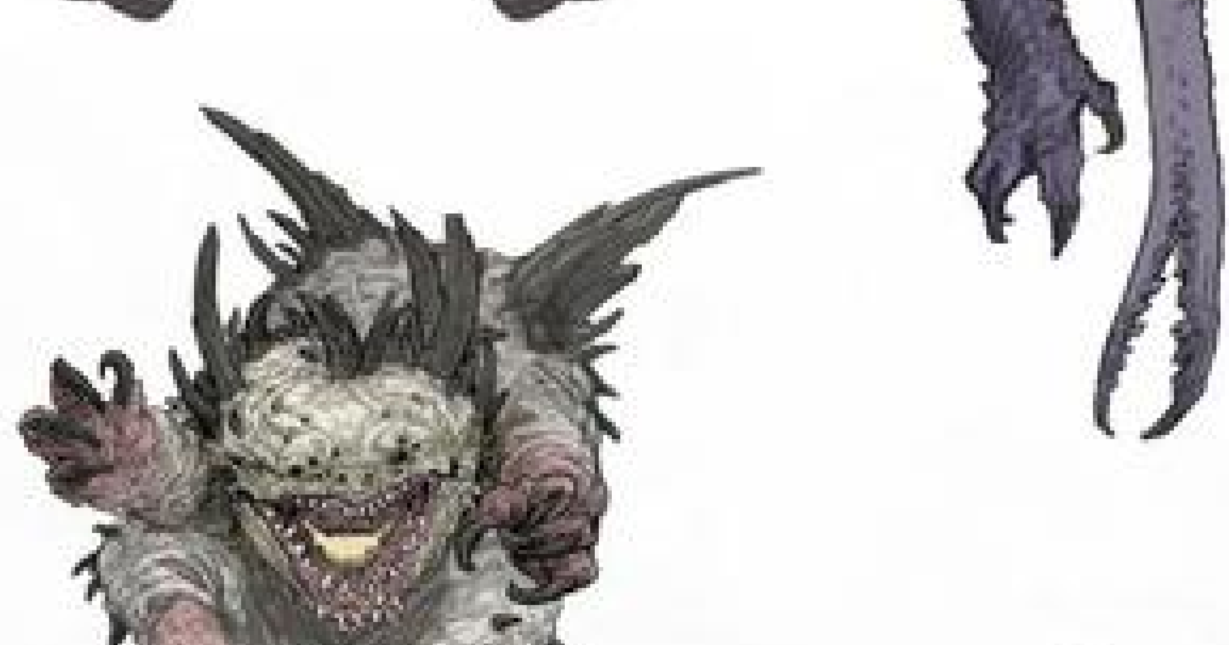


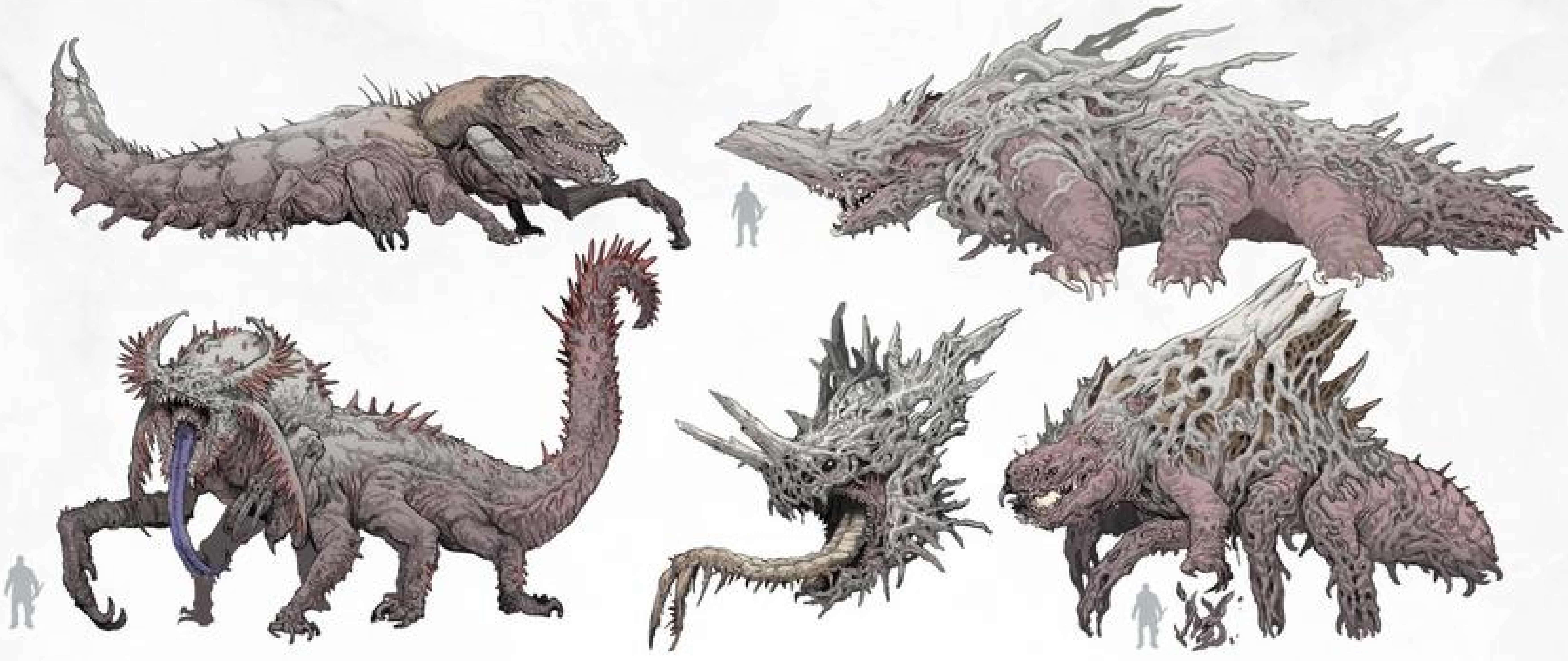




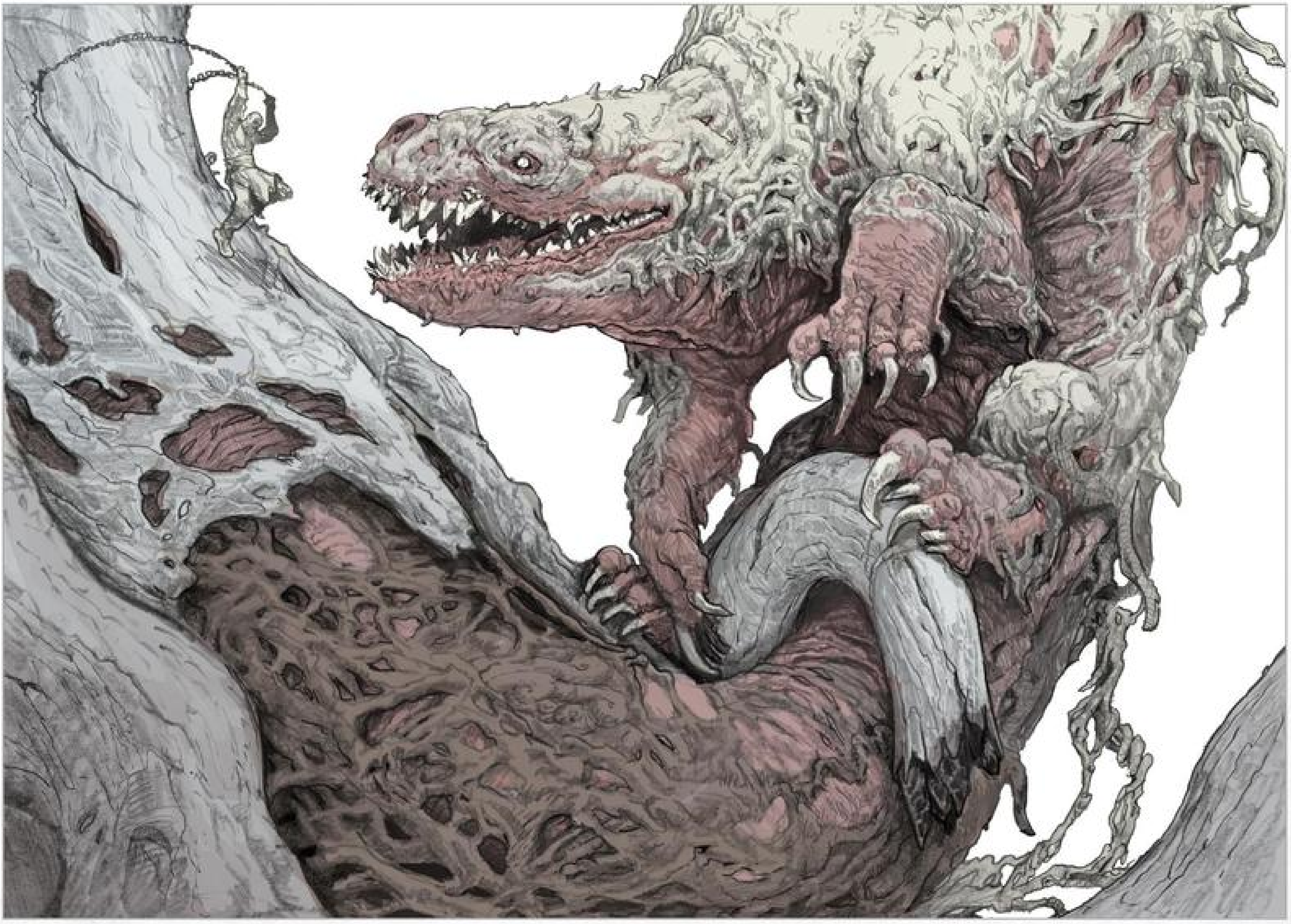








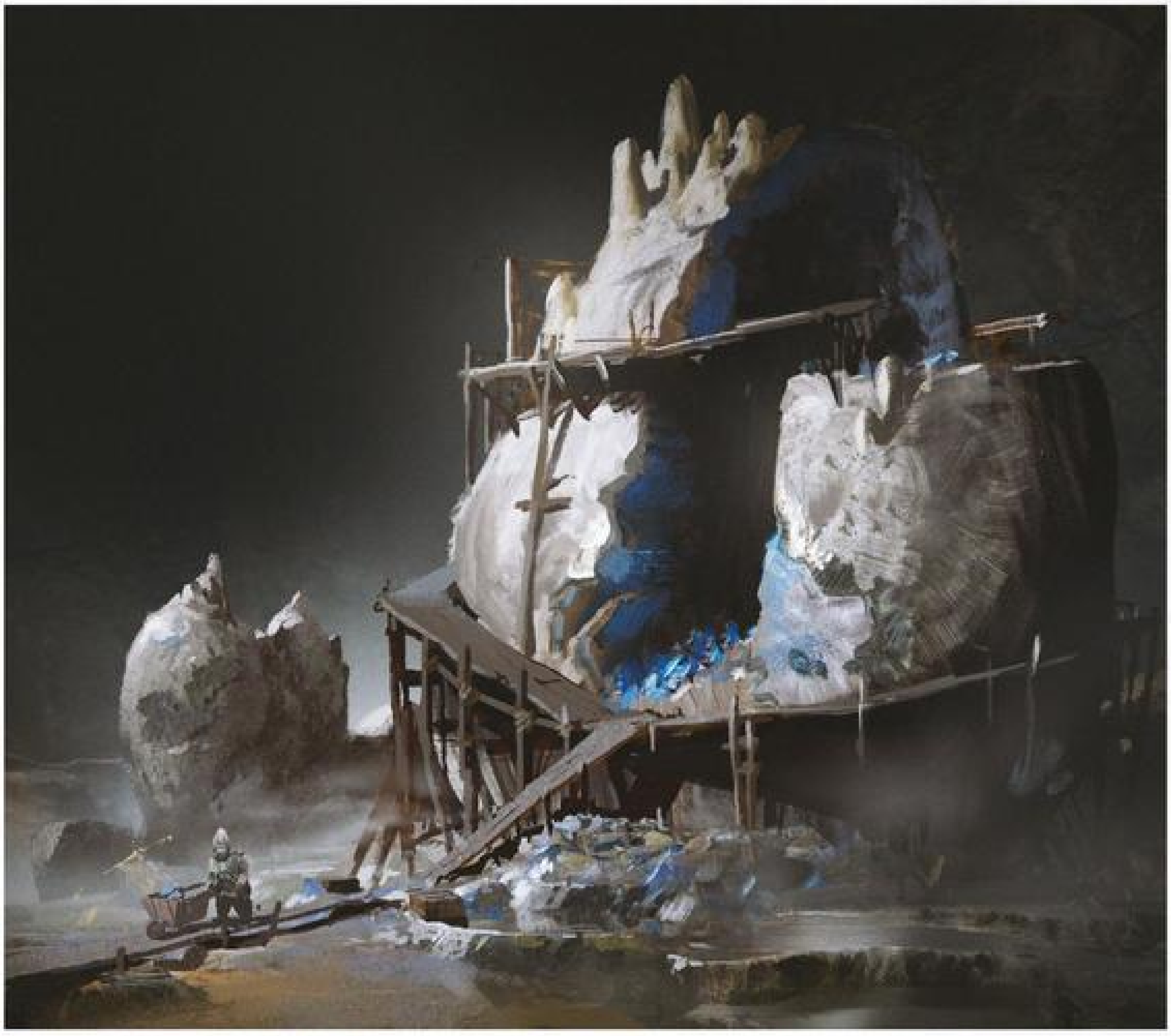
“Building off the idea that the Nidhogg’s look was inspired by the world tree, some of the early incarnations Stephen drew imagined a scale so large that Kratos would think he’s walking along the trunk of the world tree and not realize he was actually walking along the body of the Nidhogg until it surprisingly began to move under his feet,” Longfish said.

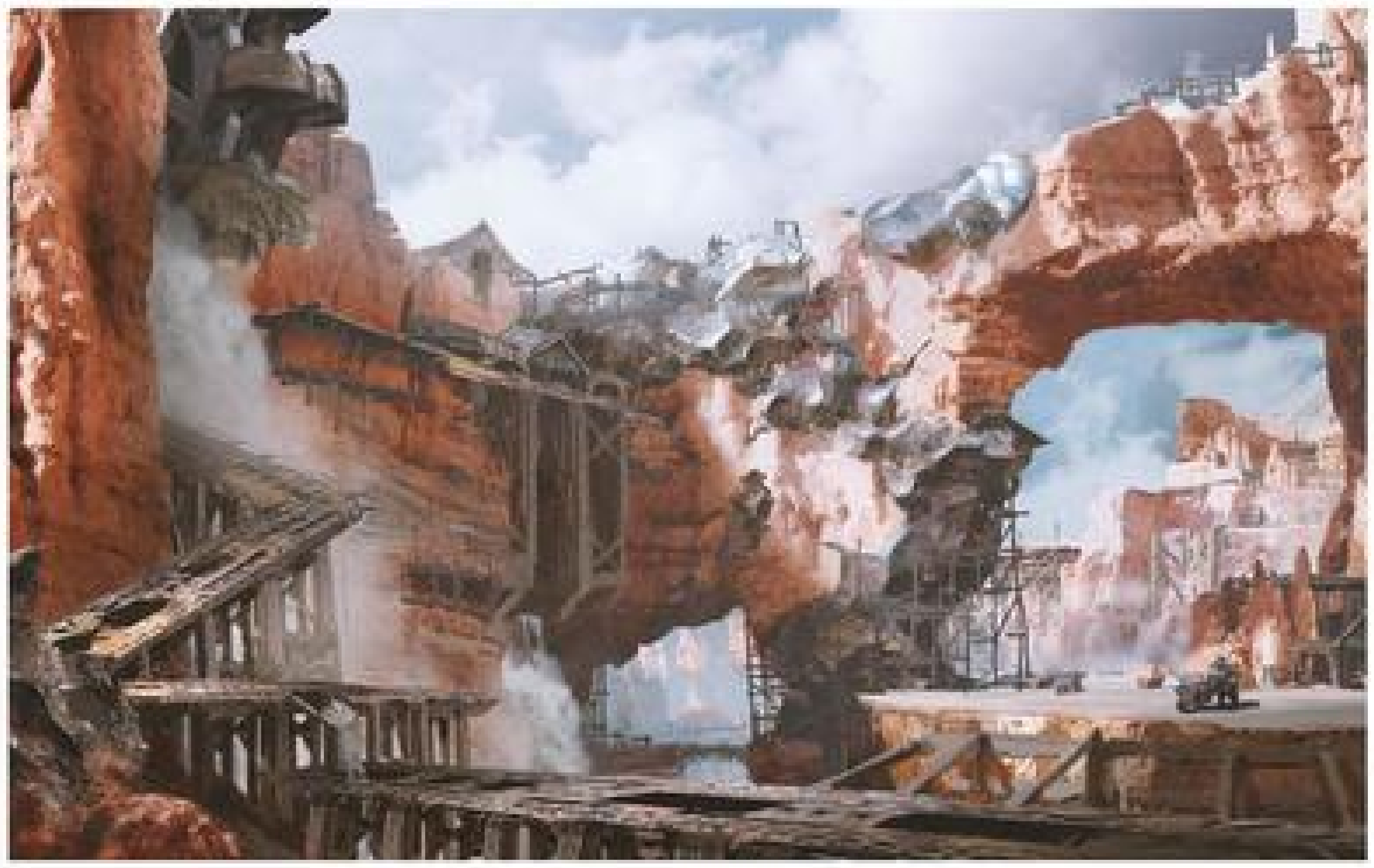


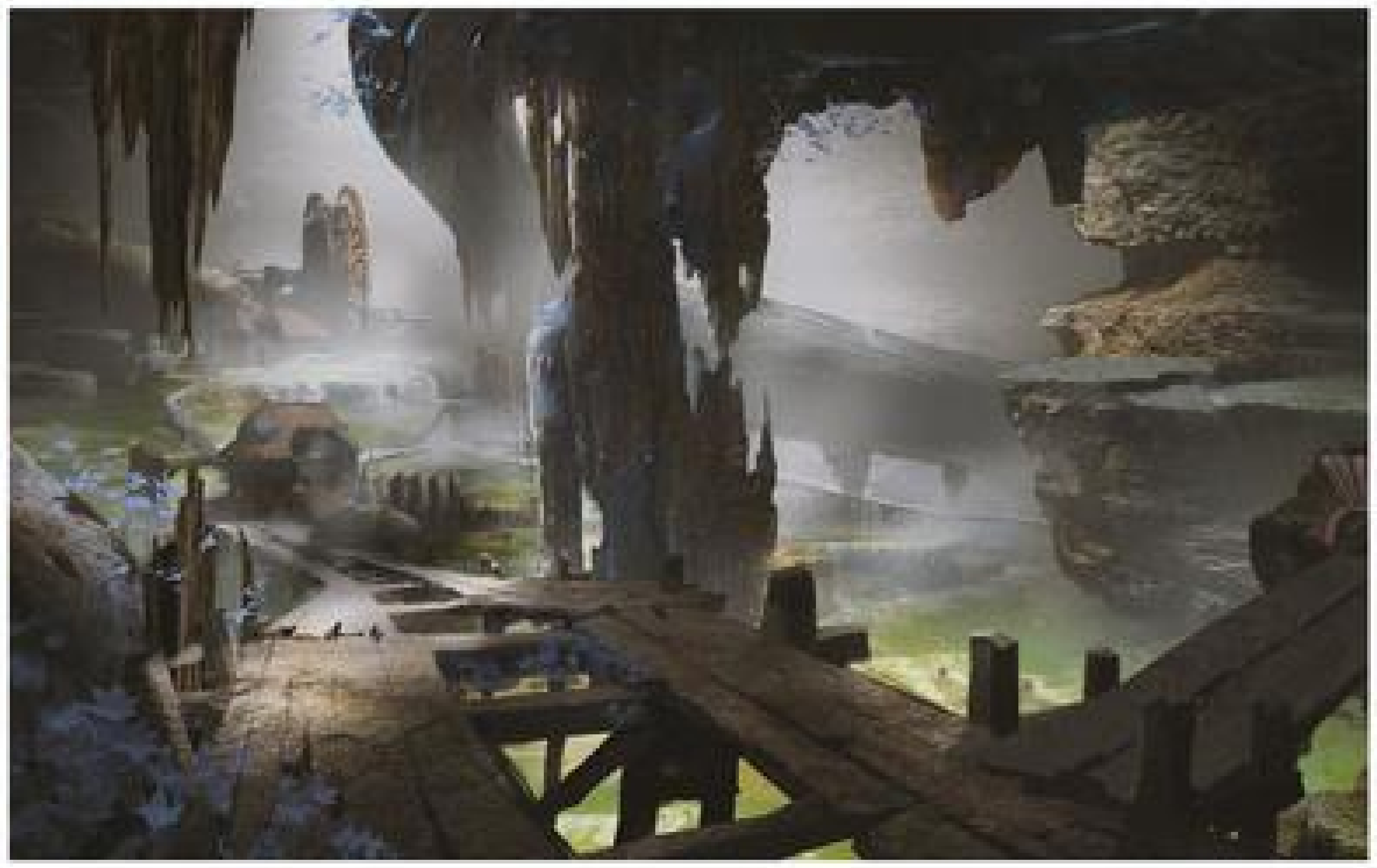
Nidhogg resembling the world tree. Artist: Stephen Oakley

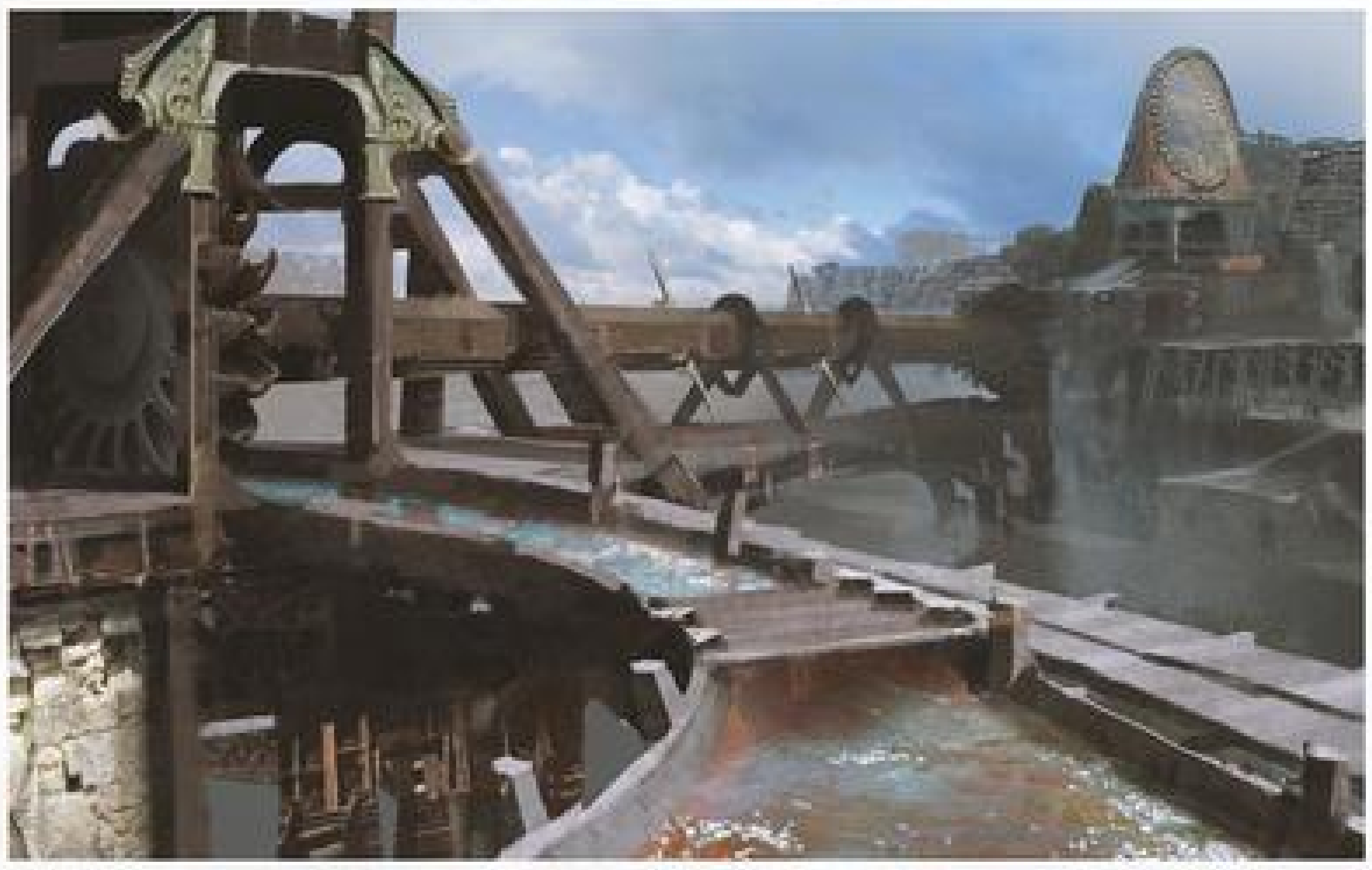
As the team delved into various mining techniques and locations around the realm of Svartalfheim, they discovered ample opportunities to incorporate historical mining techniques with their own mythical twists. One source of inspiration was close to home: California has a lengthy mining history, including the 1849 gold rush. However, the team also examined mining practices from around the world to inform their art studies.

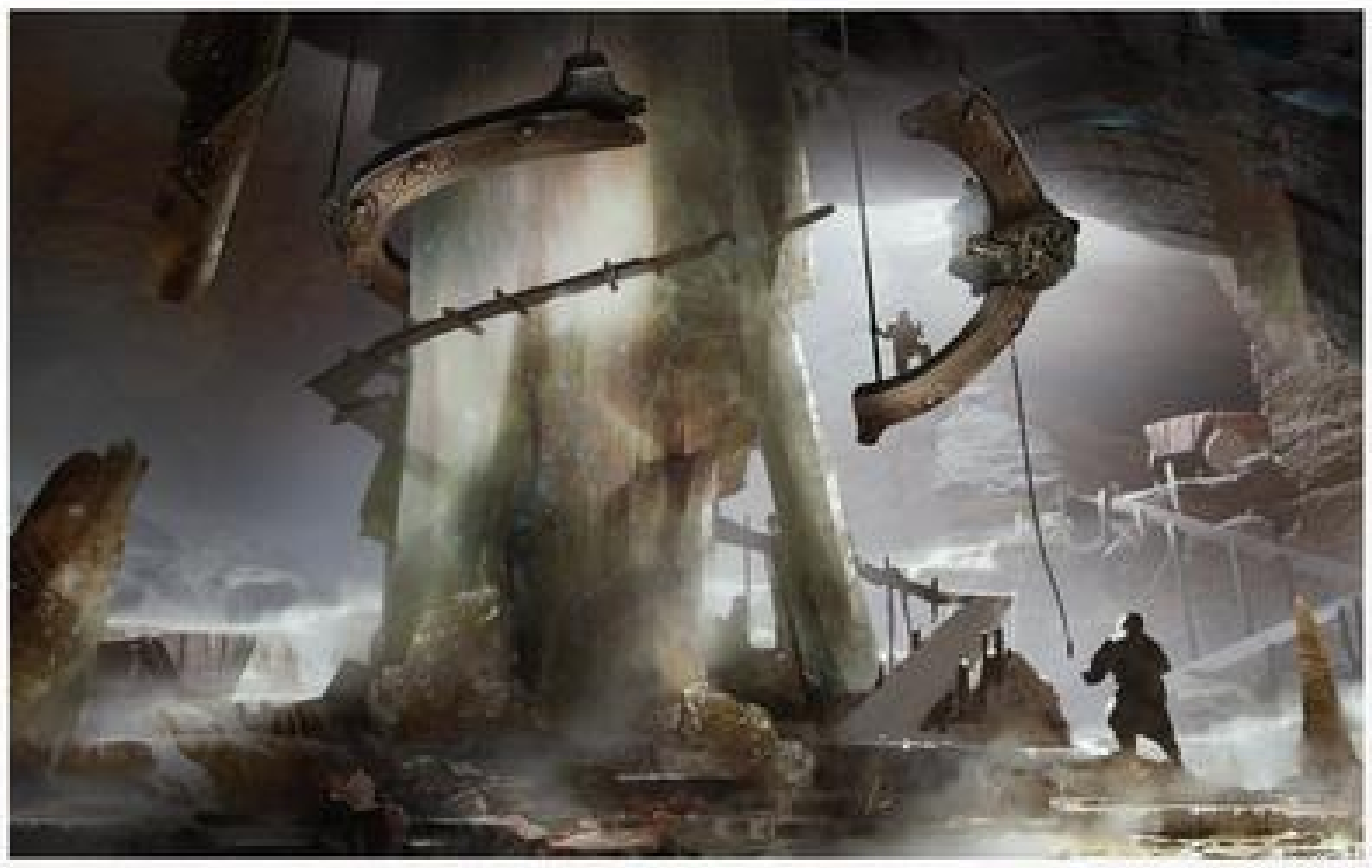
Berliner said, "We explored ideas like mining the sap from the world tree to find deep mineral veins, tapping into geothermal tunnels, or excavating large underground mines—those were all on the table. The mines also offered a wealth of opportunities to find puzzles and gameplay ideas."



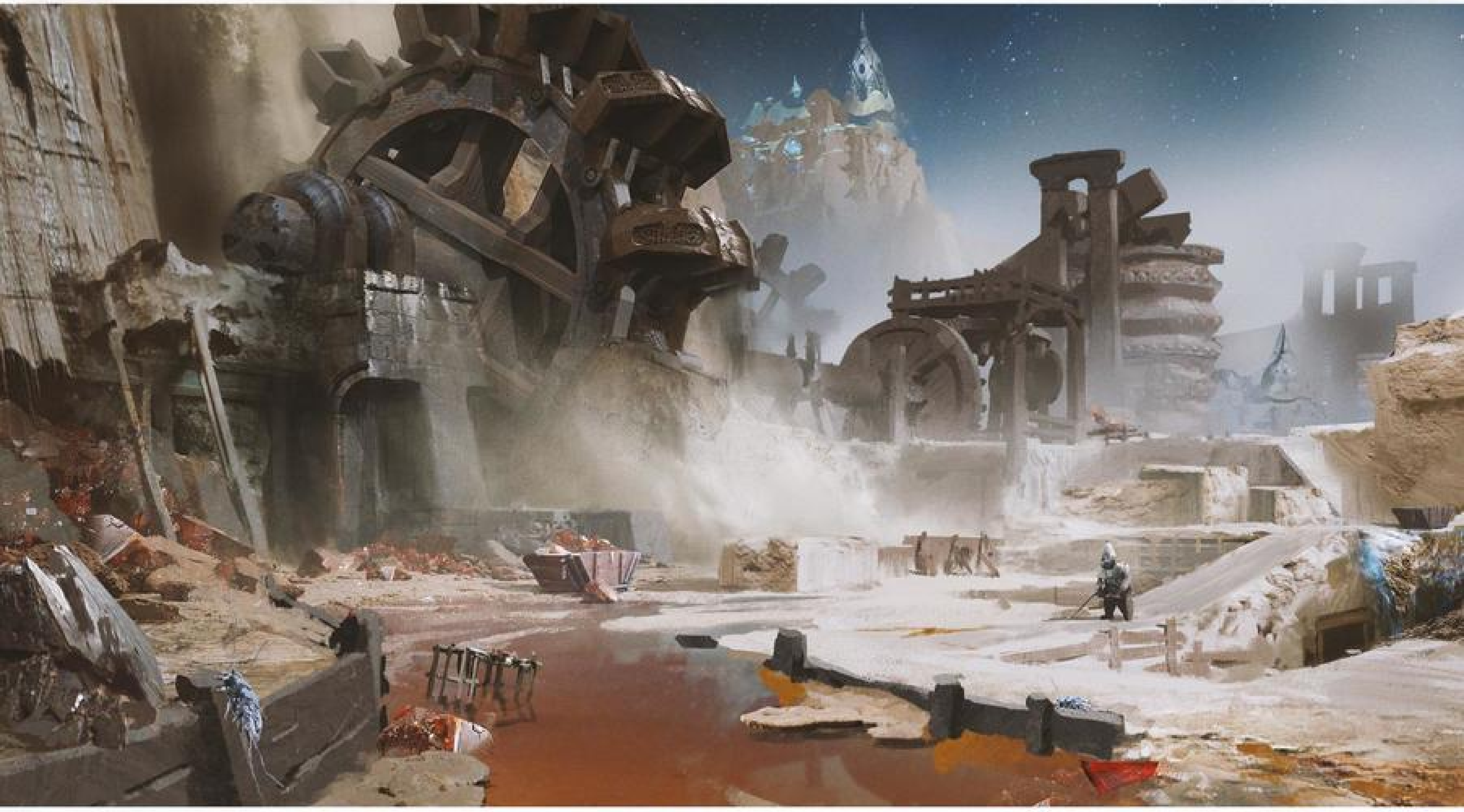


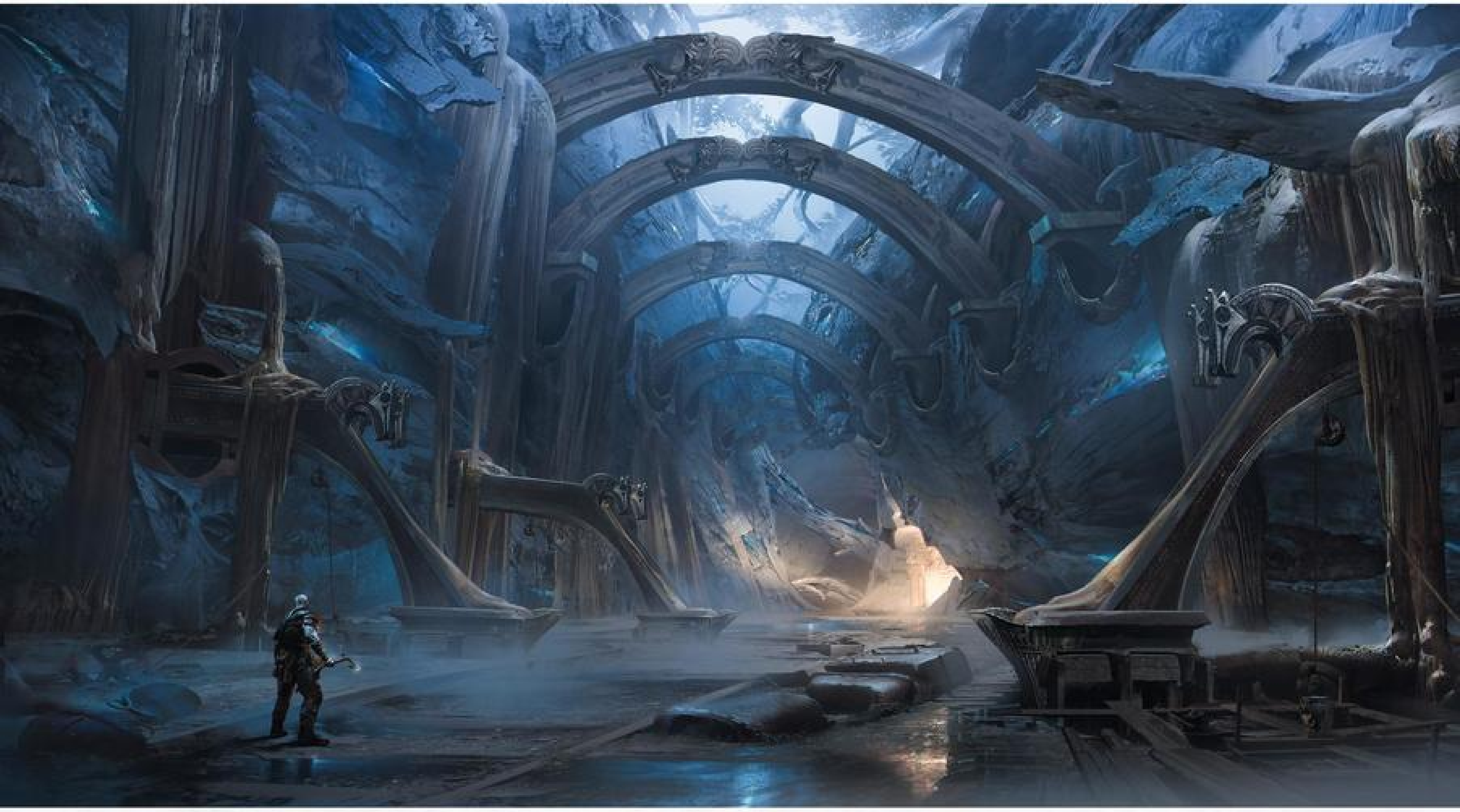






Mine concepts for Svartalfheim. Artist: Luke Berliner

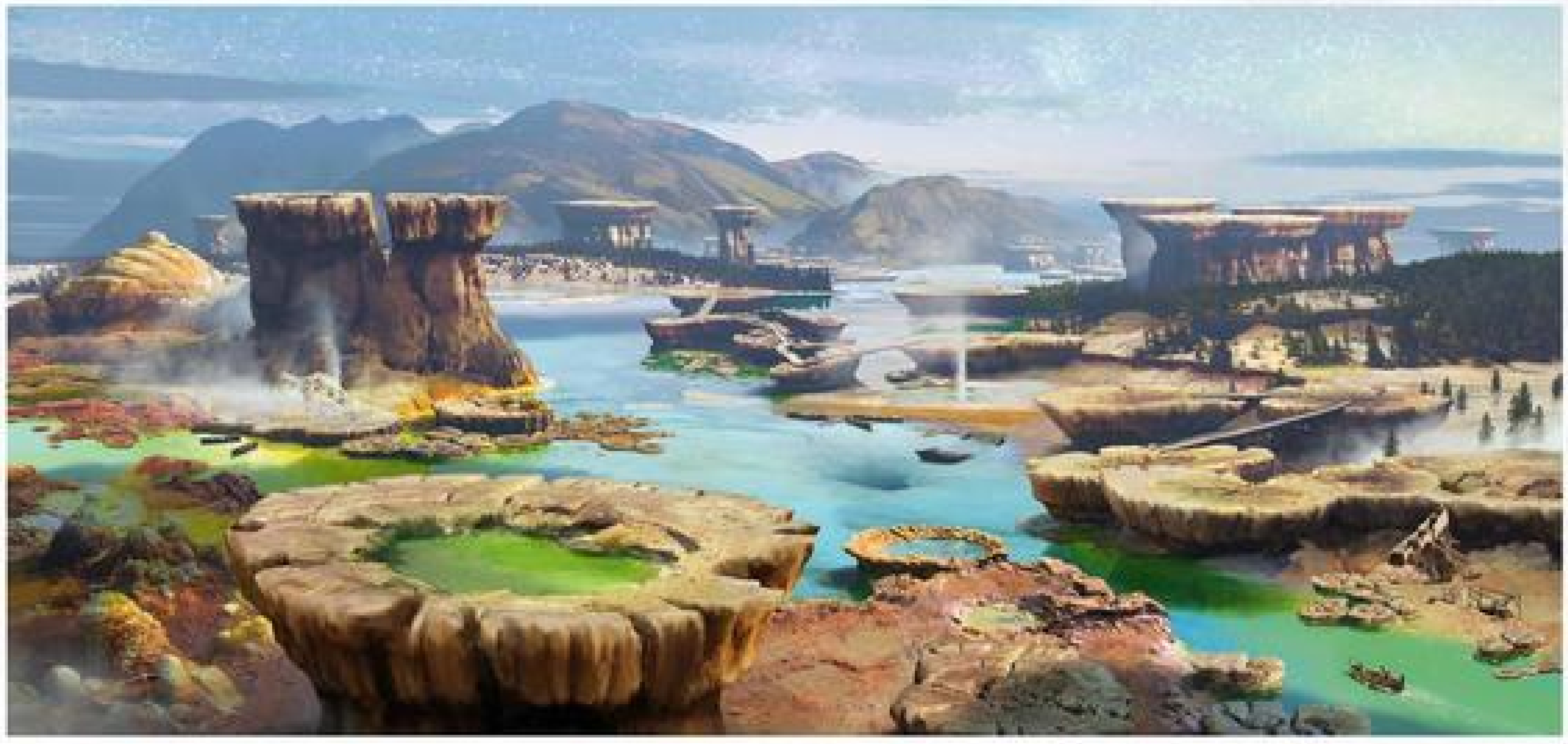


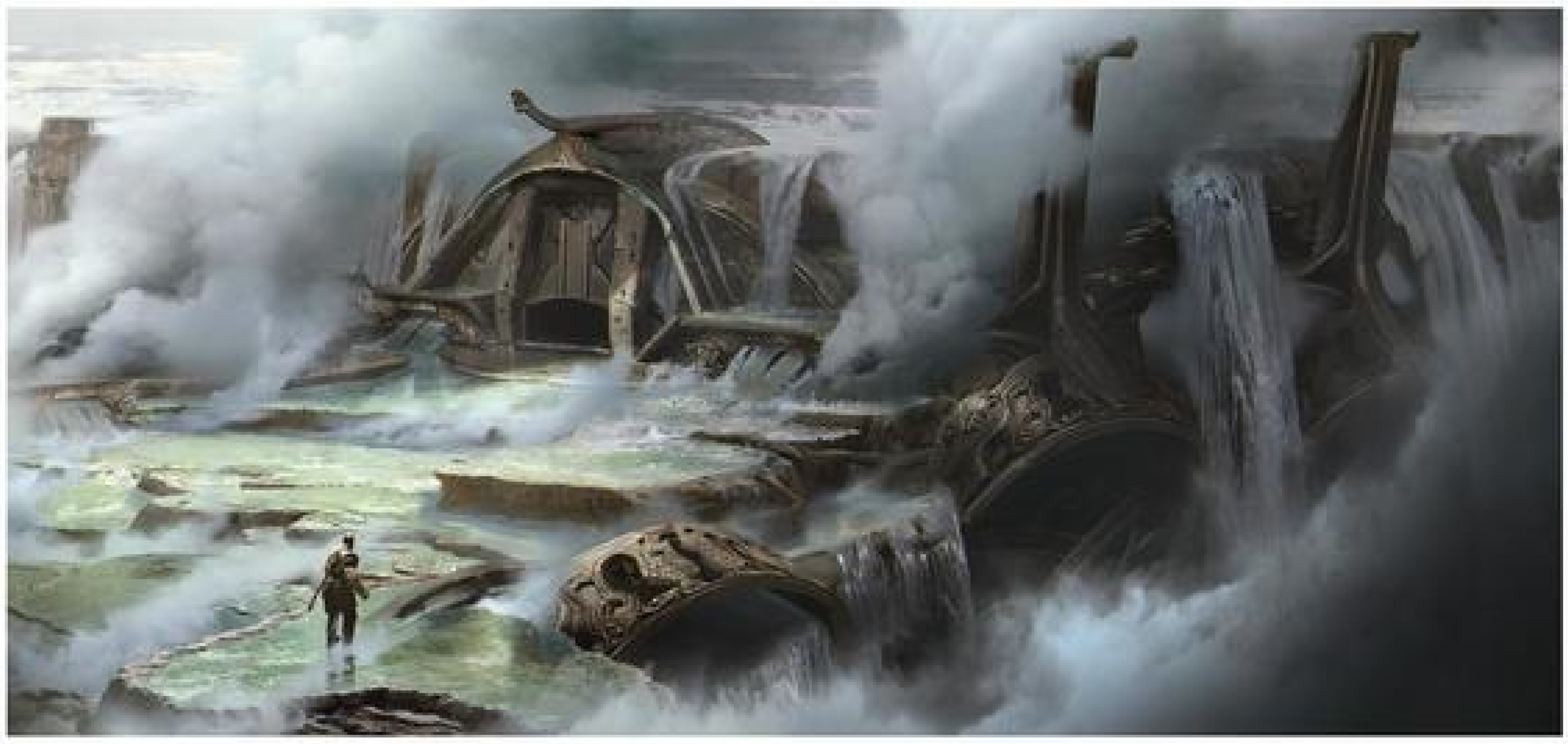


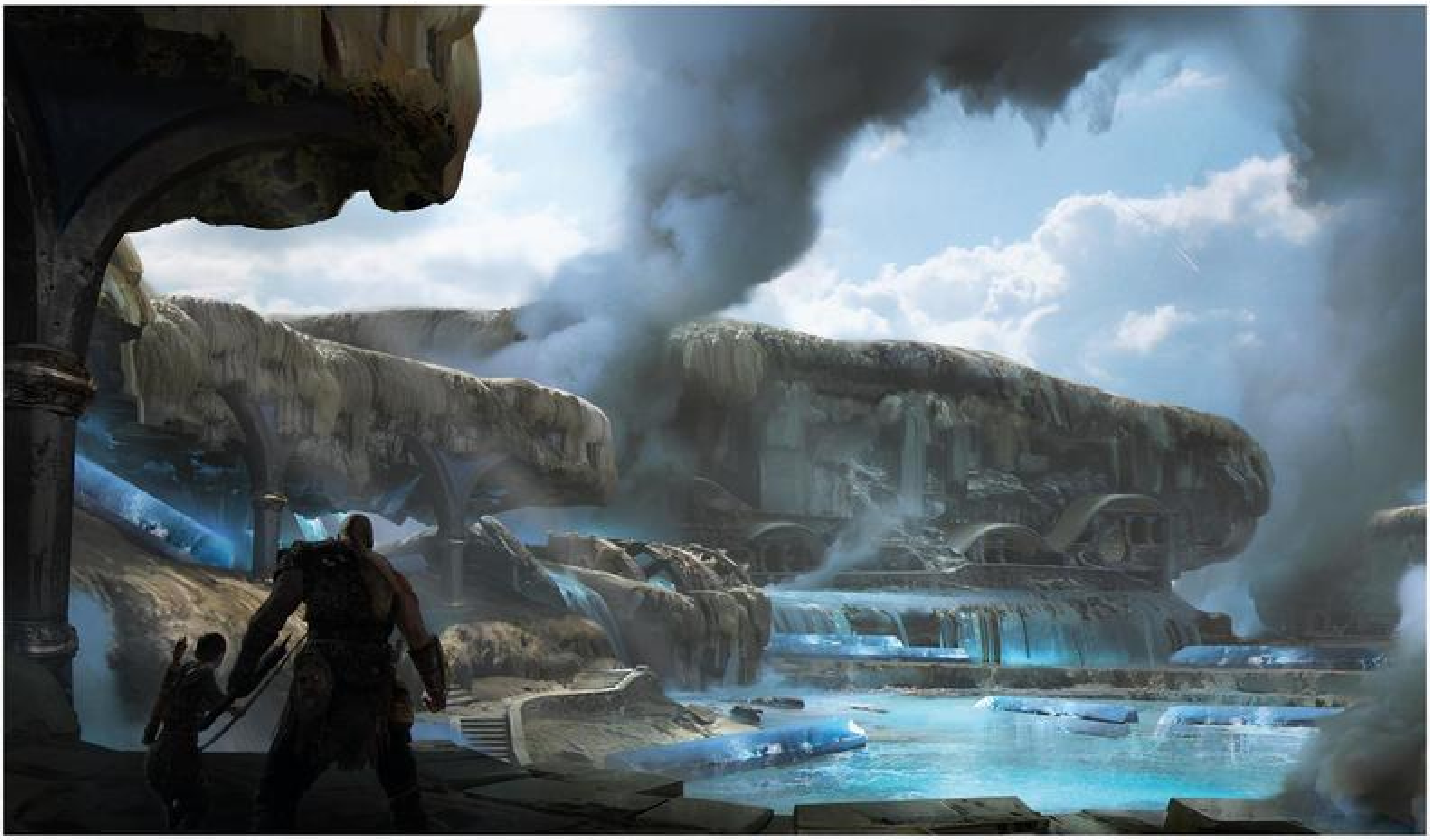
Cavernous mine area explorations. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Abe Taraky (bottom)

The realm of Svartalfheim sprawls across a large level in the game. The artists wanted to fill the realm with several diverse biomes to break up the region. These concepts illustrate the different habitats, from the mountain forge to wetlands to the town to the North Bay to the pit mines. Throughout these vast, visually striking areas, the team consistently highlighted the realm's mining activities, showing the balance and transitions between industry and nature. They explored how mined goods would be delivered, as well as routes where barges loaded with goods would deposit their riches.

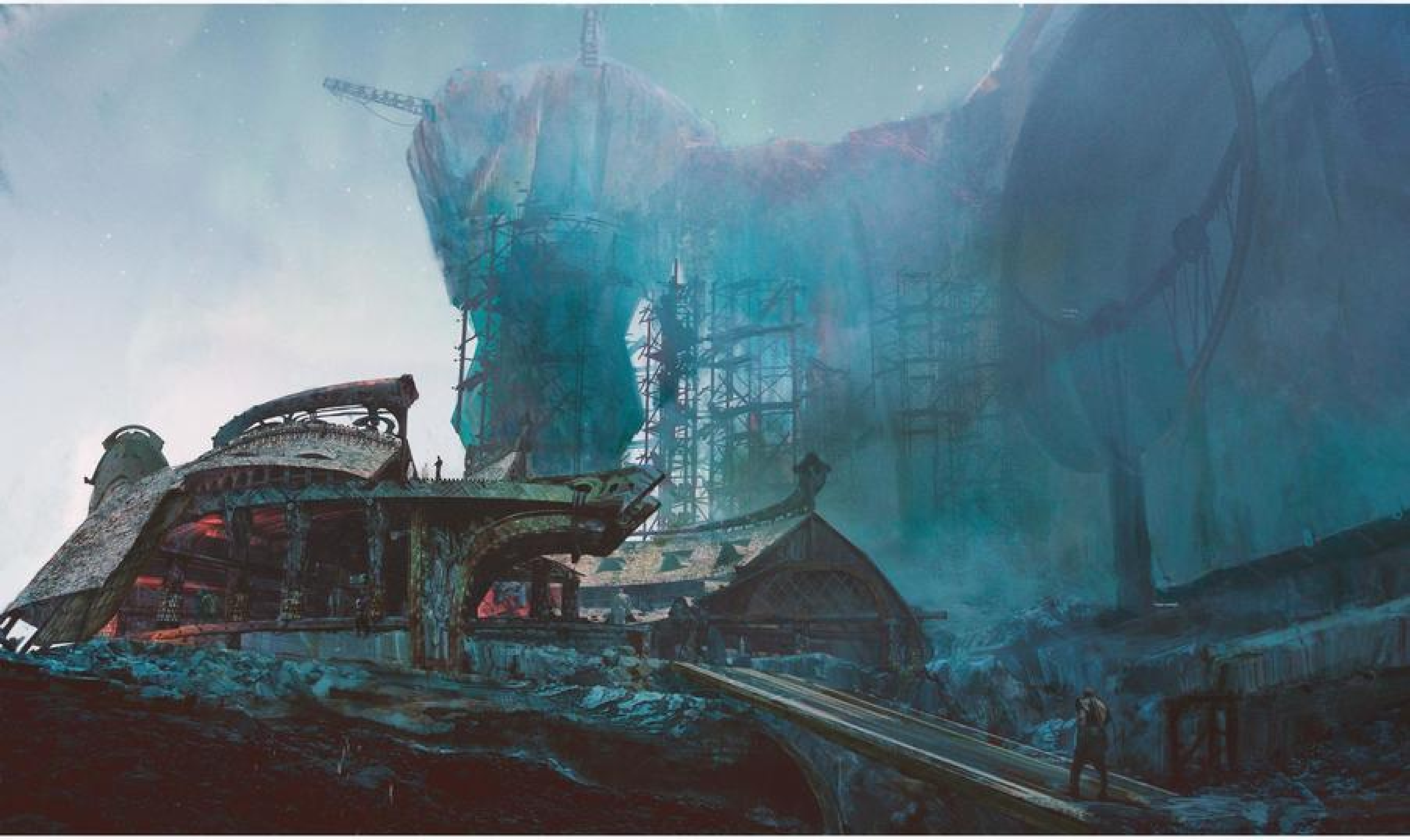
They included a sense of industrial mining throughout the realm with large set pieces and mines. However, they also made sure to include smaller encampments that show the private claims of Dwarves independently seeking riches.

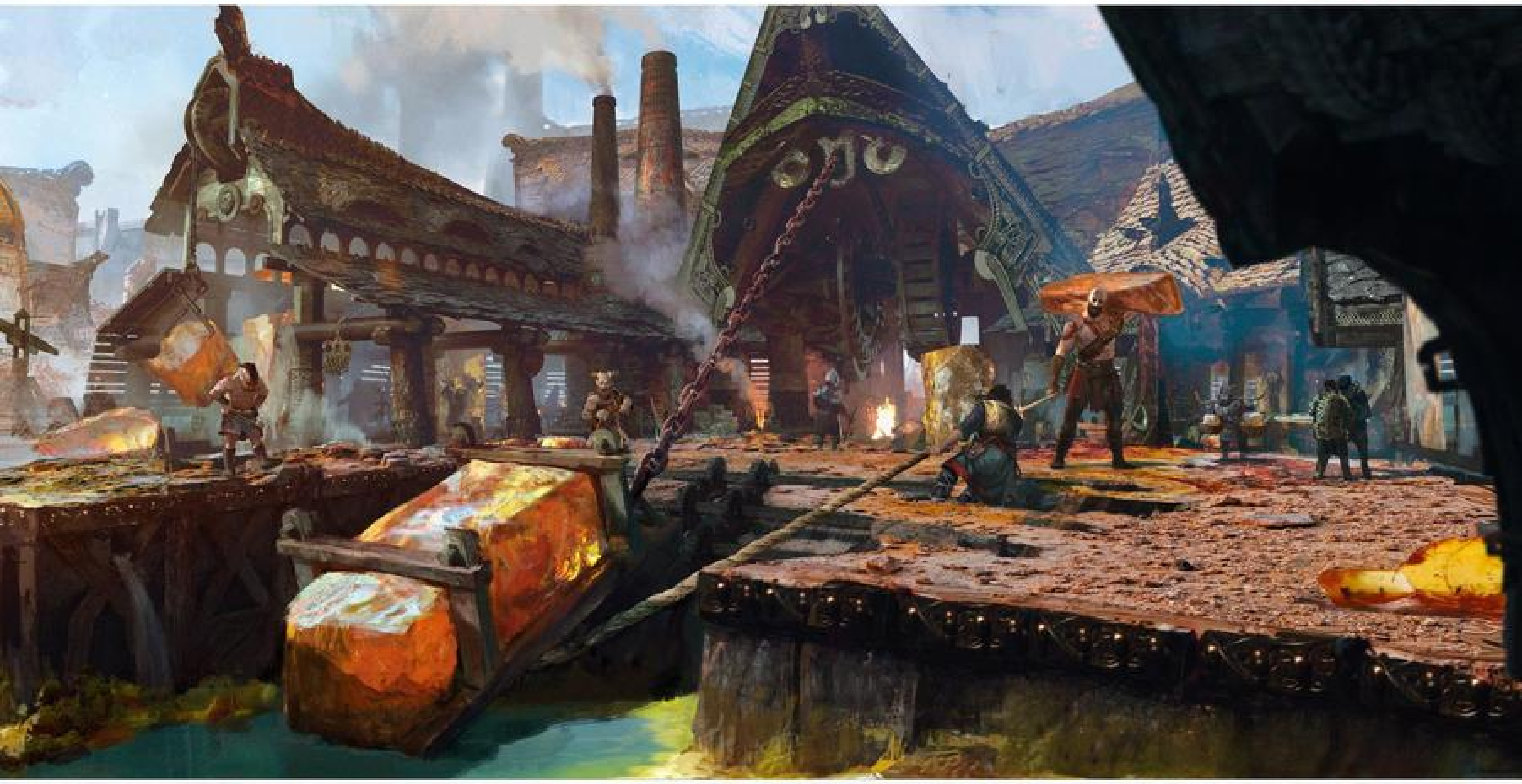






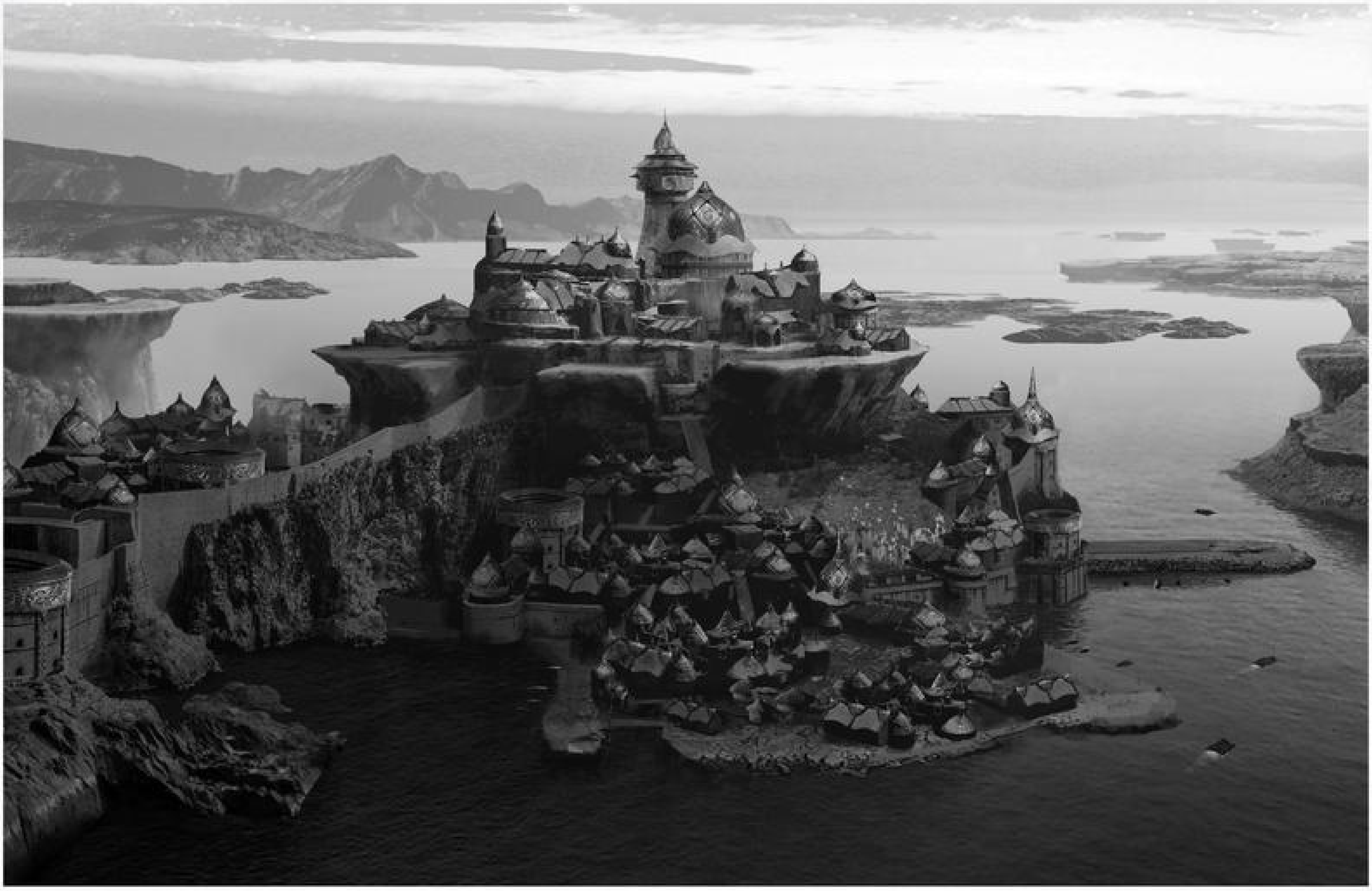
Geothermal features of Svartalfheim. Artists: Mark Castanon (top); Abe Taraky (middle and bottom)

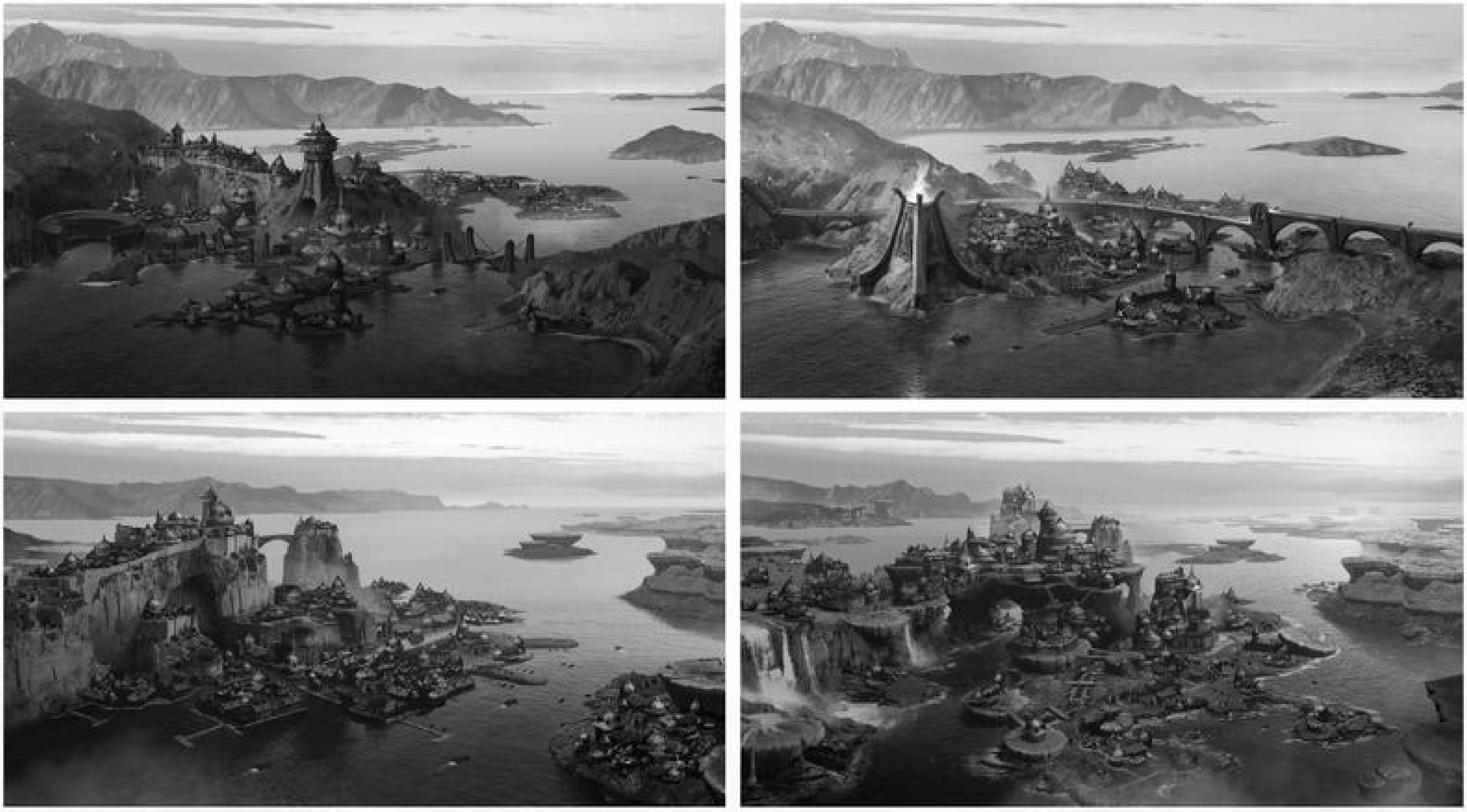




Examining how mining goods move. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio

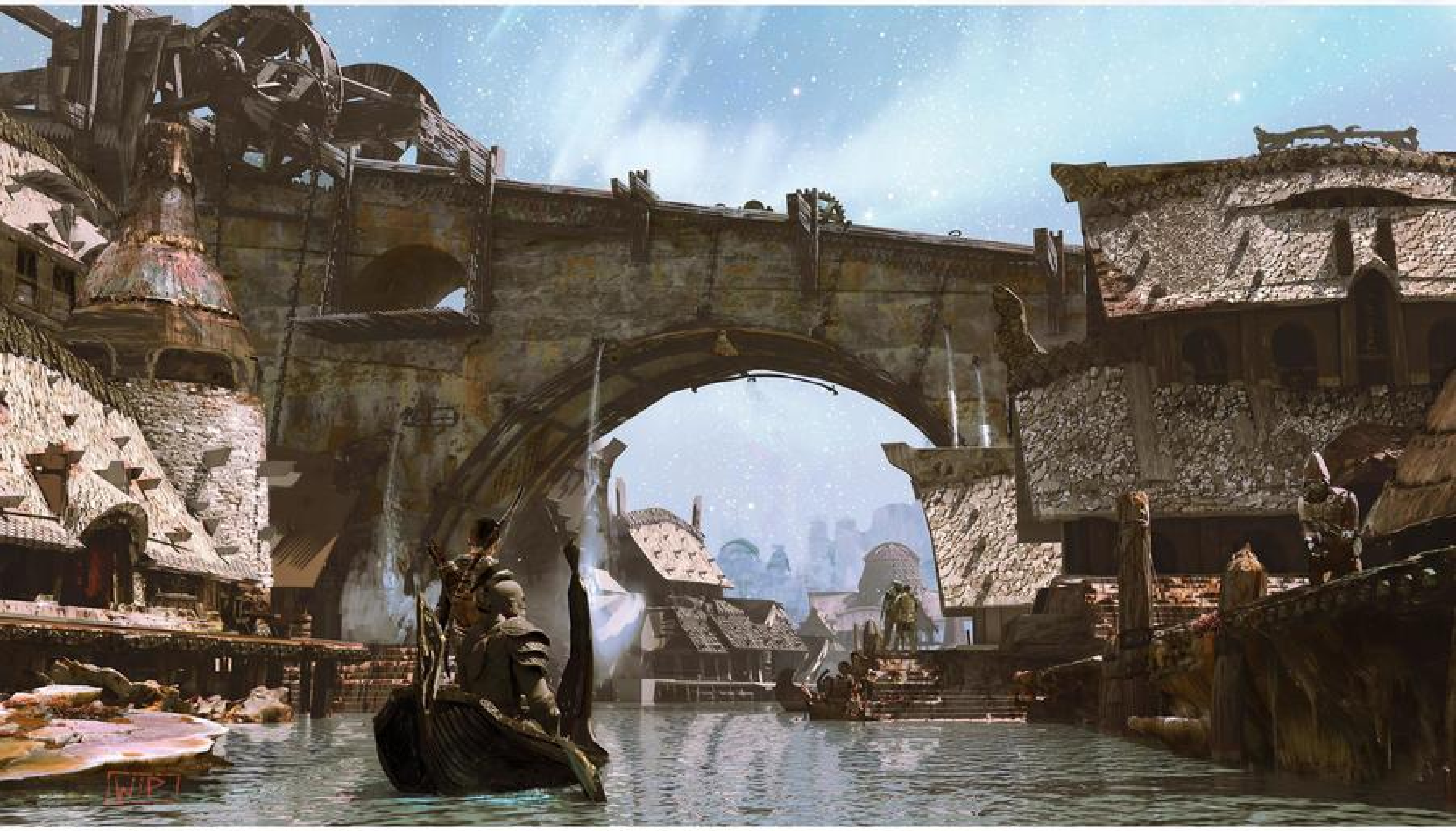
The Dwarven city of Nidavellir. Artist: Mark Castanon

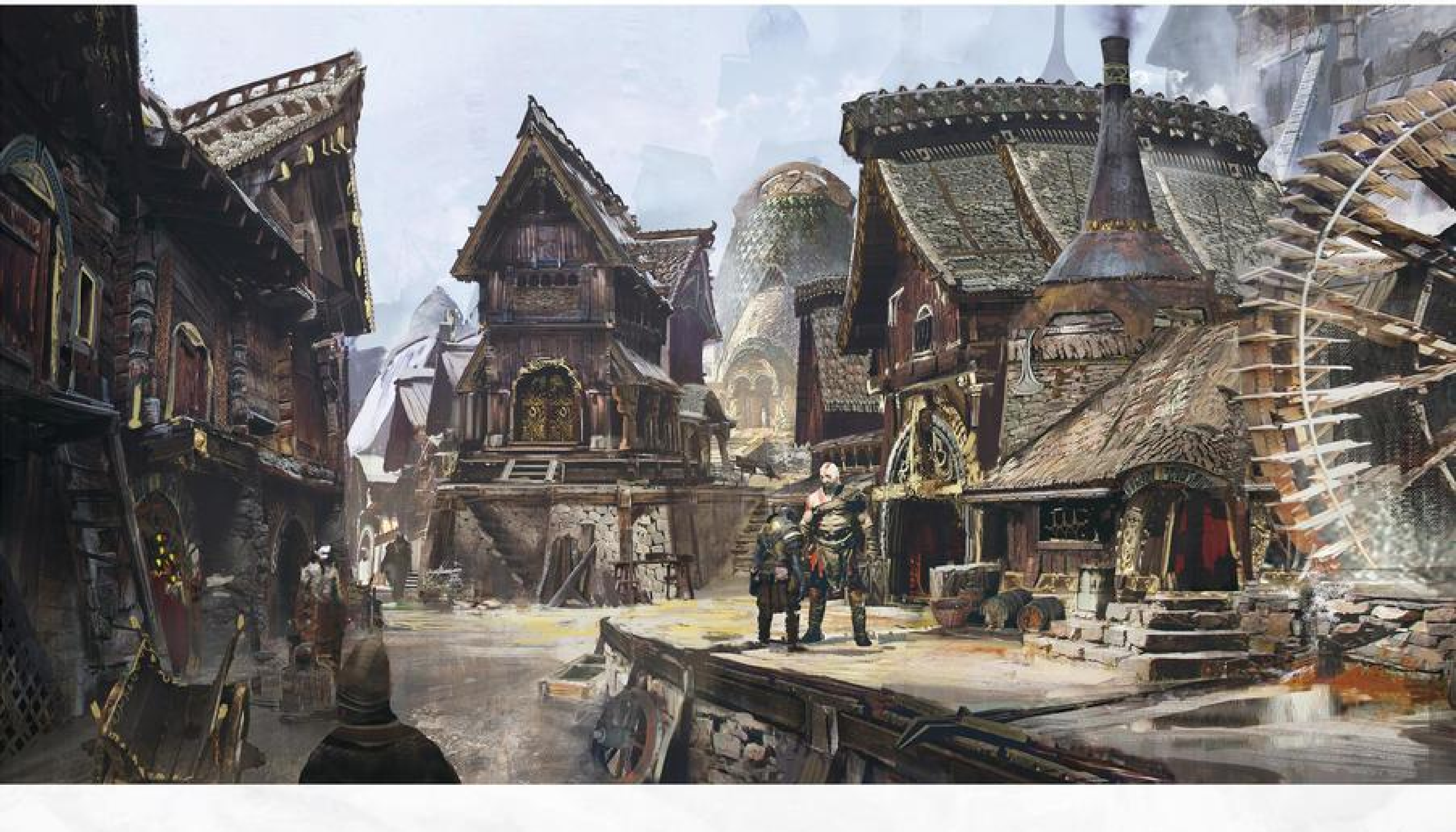




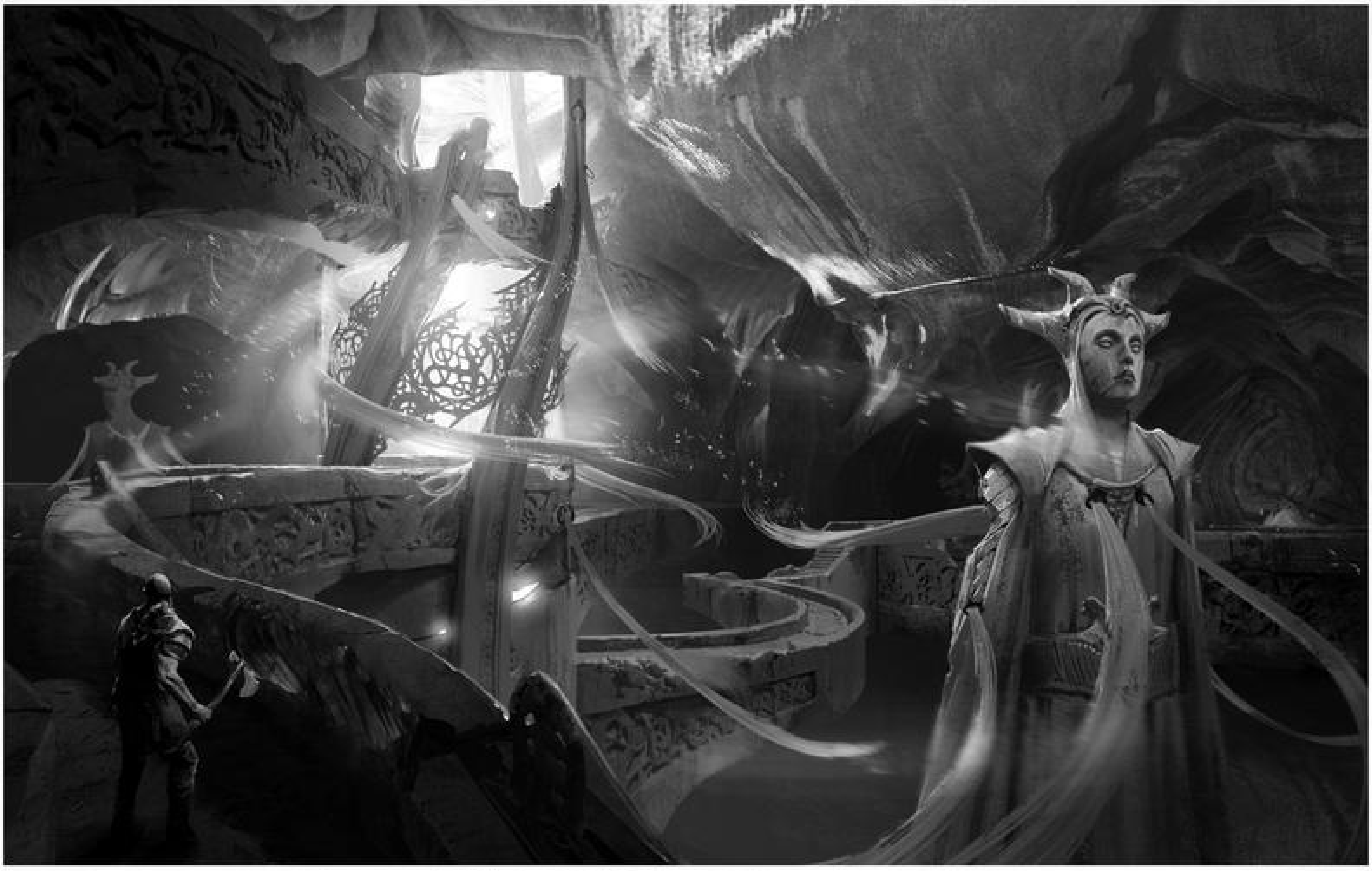
Though mines are abundant in Svartalfheim, the realm has cities as well. Castanon explored the large Dwarven city of Nidavellir, which the team wanted to have a lively, dense feel with a visually playful look. Simultaneously, it was important to capture a strong sense of elevation for potential gameplay. Castanon said, "In trying to accomplish this, I took a lot of inspiration from old coastal cliffside towns in Italy while also trying to inspire any unique city landmarks we could have."

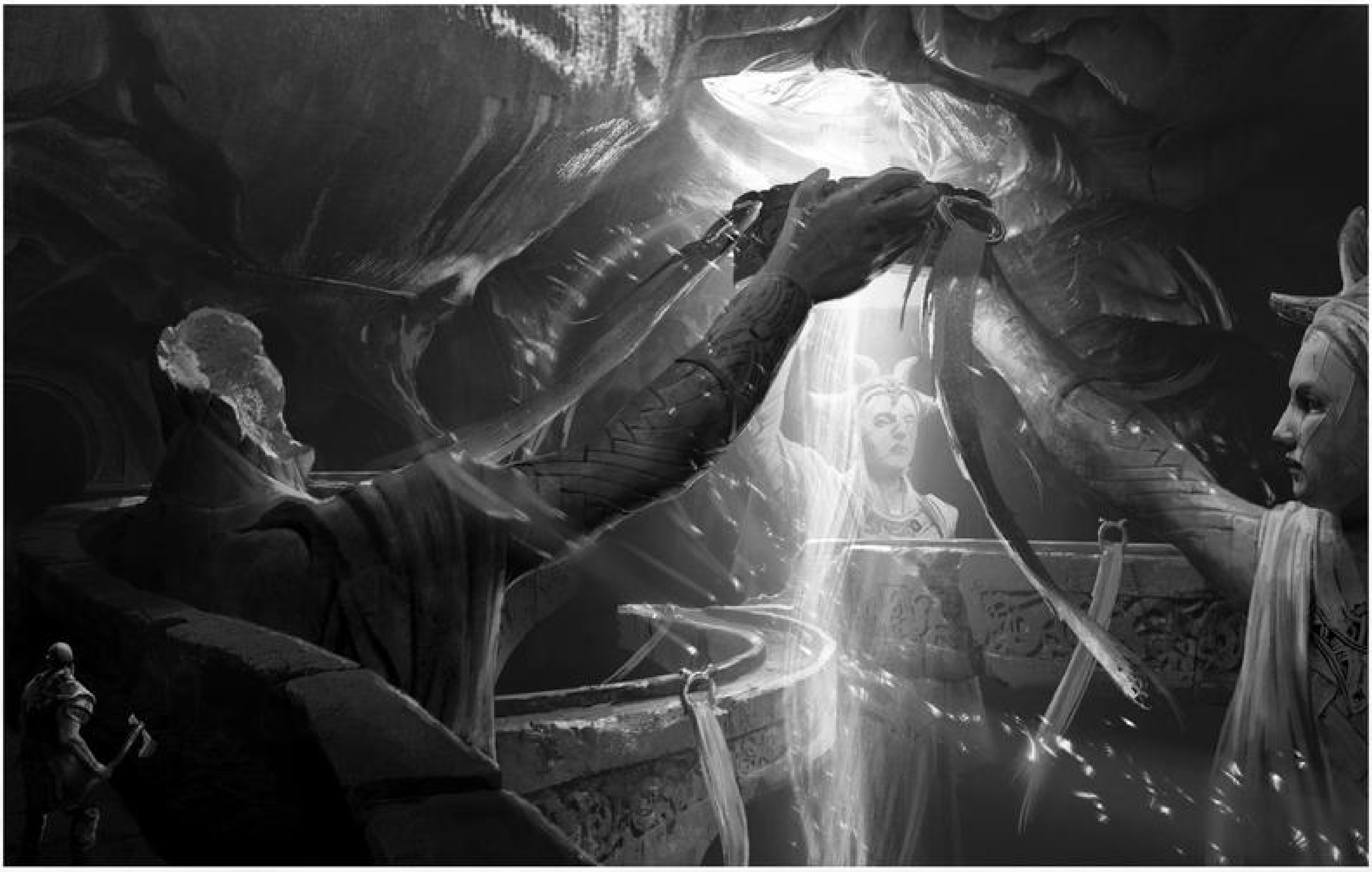
Bustling town scenes in Svartalfheim. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio



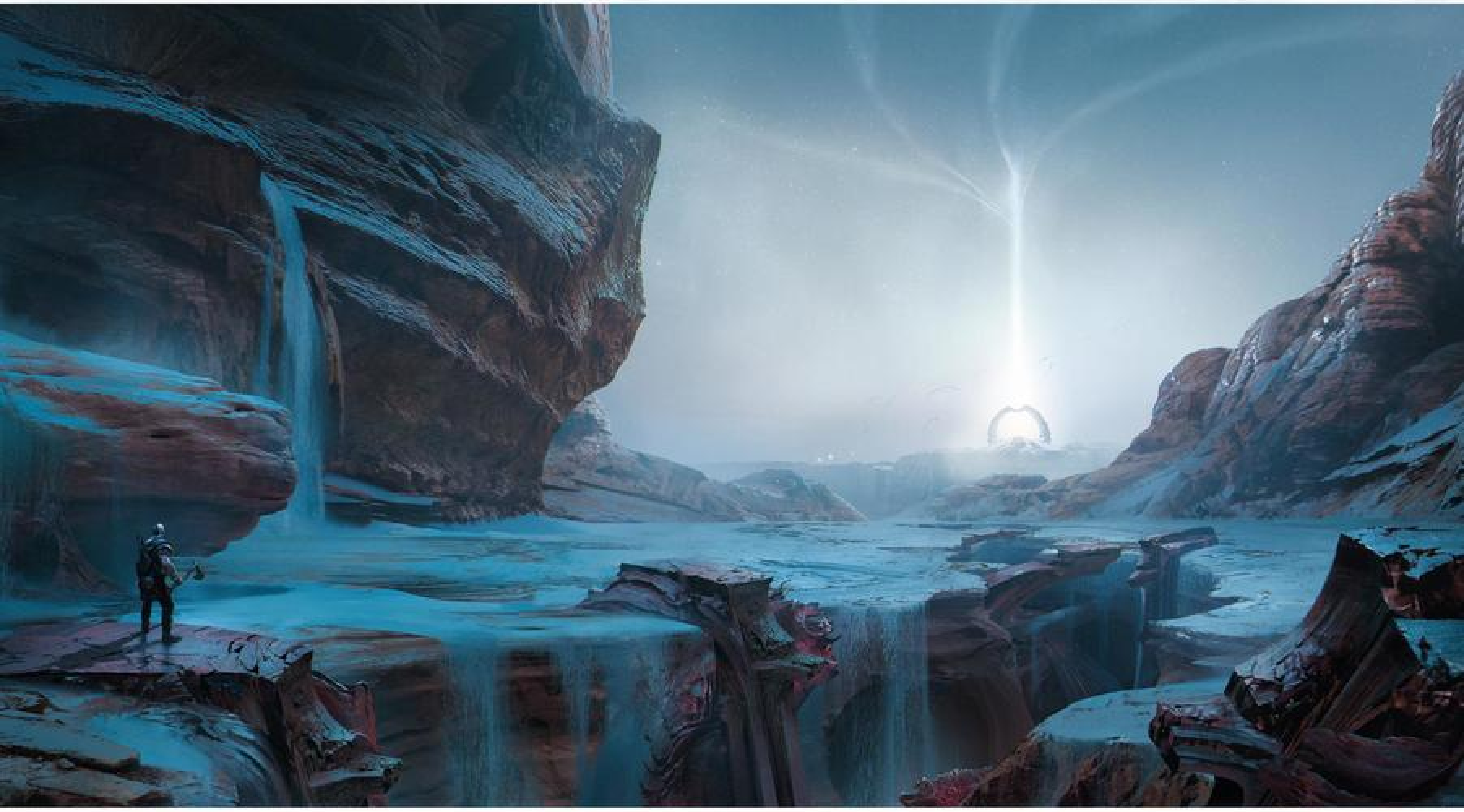


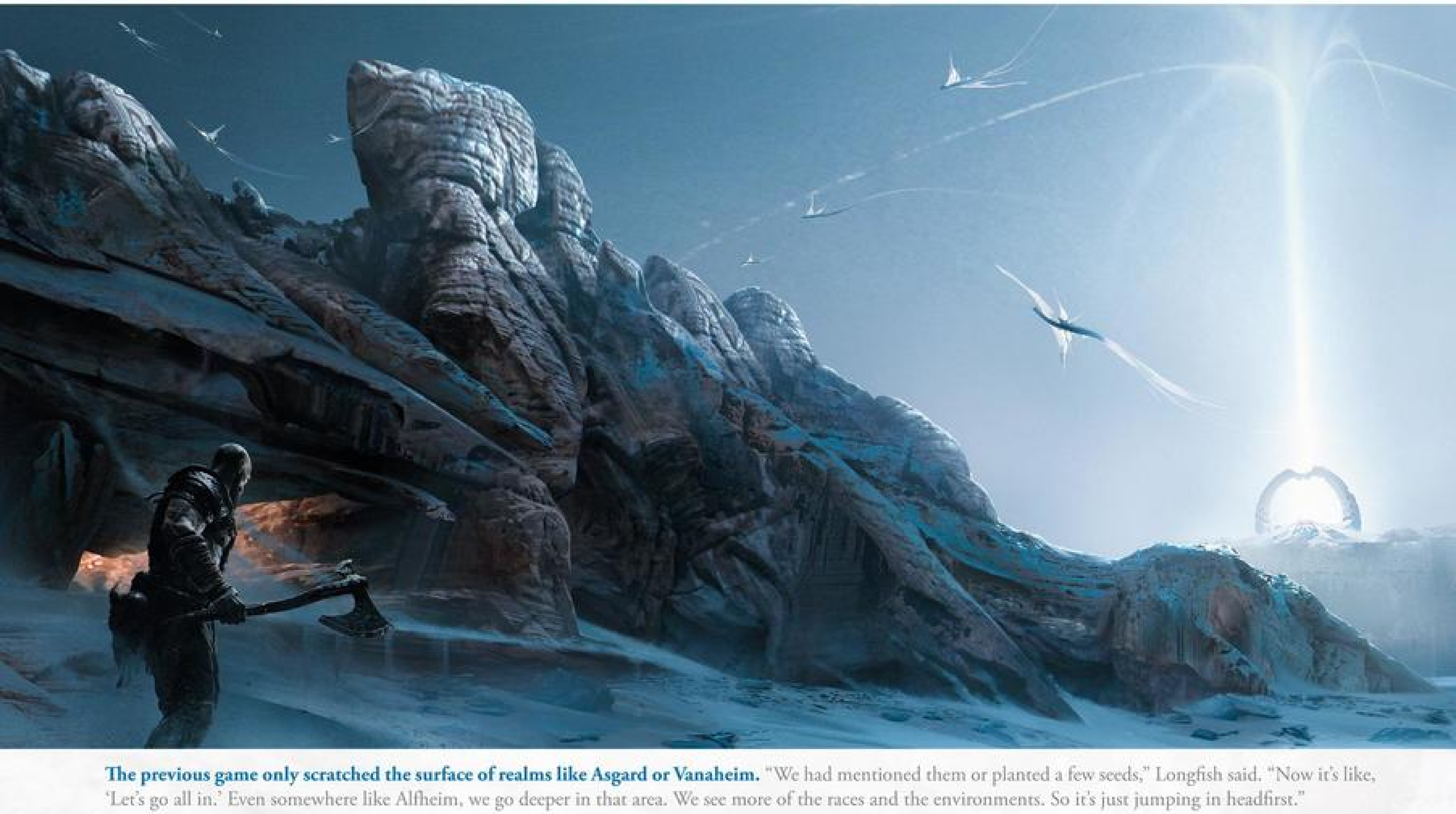
Statues in Alfheim. Artist: Mark Castanon





Alfheim light concepts. Artist: Abe Taraky

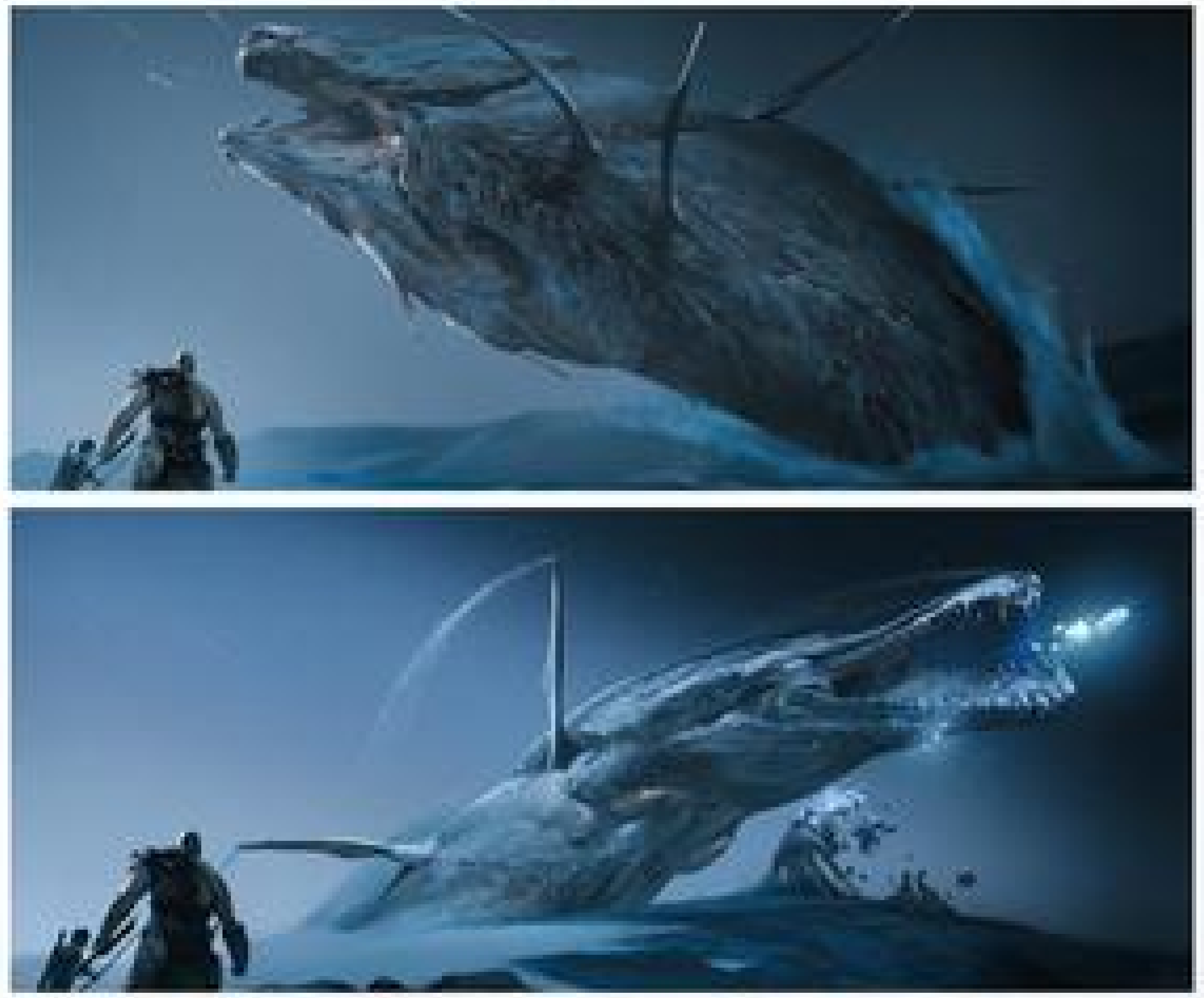




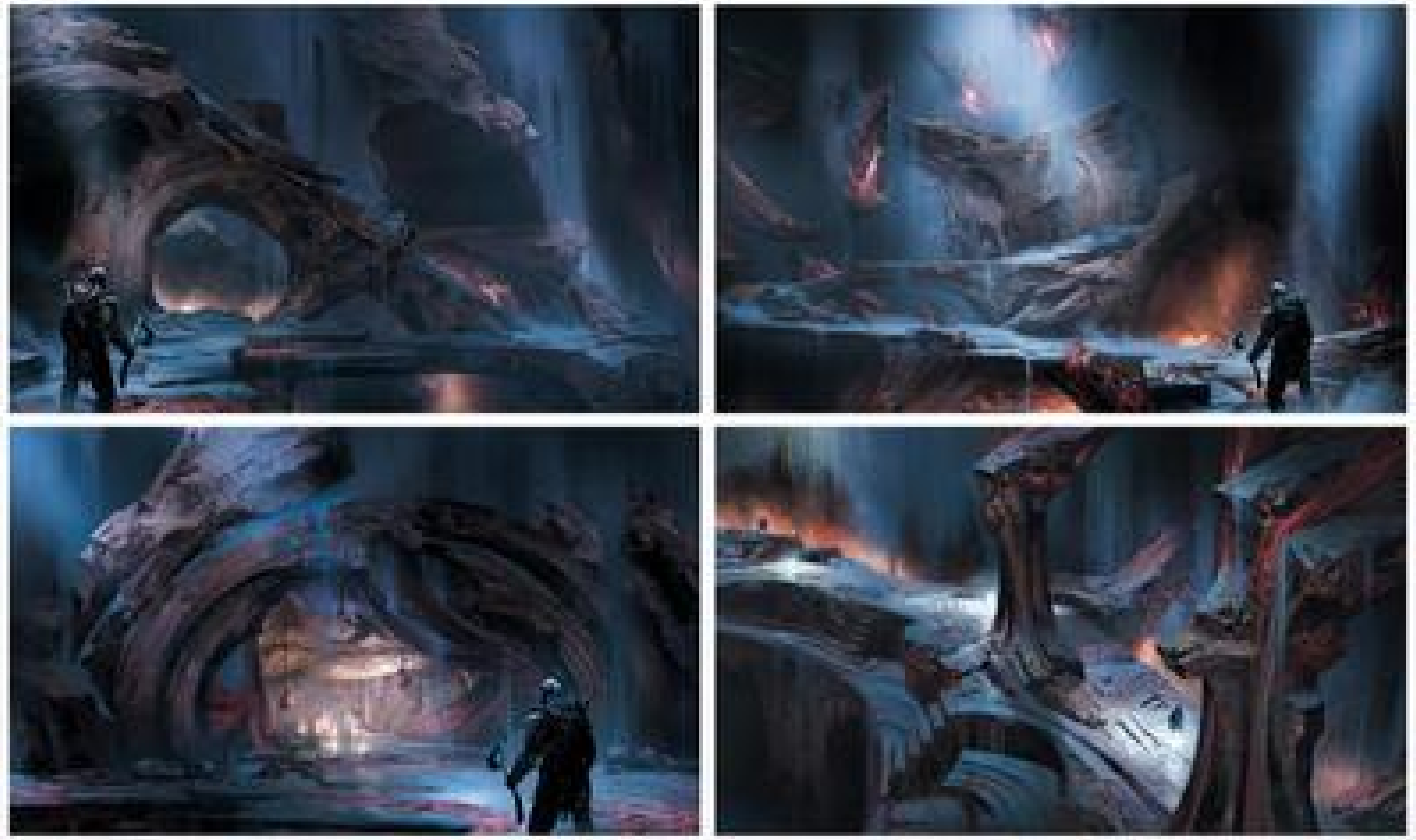
The previous game only scratched the surface of realms like Asgard or Vanaheim. "We had mentioned them or planted a few seeds," Longfish said. "Now it's like, 'Let's go all in.' Even somewhere like Alfheim, we go deeper in that area. We see more of the races and the environments. So it's just jumping in headfirst."

Returning to the Elven realm of Alfheim gave artists the opportunity to show more of the region's history besides the temple and the Lake of Light. The team considered the desert in Alfheim and wanted to establish the idea of a dry ocean—implying that the space had once been under water.

"A lot of proposals went into exploring the wildlife that could reinforce that," Berliner said. "Could we see ray-like creatures flying overhead or large animals breaching the sand? It was also a chance to elaborate on the story of the Elves, showing the history of the war and how, for years, they had been pushed back to live in deep canyons."



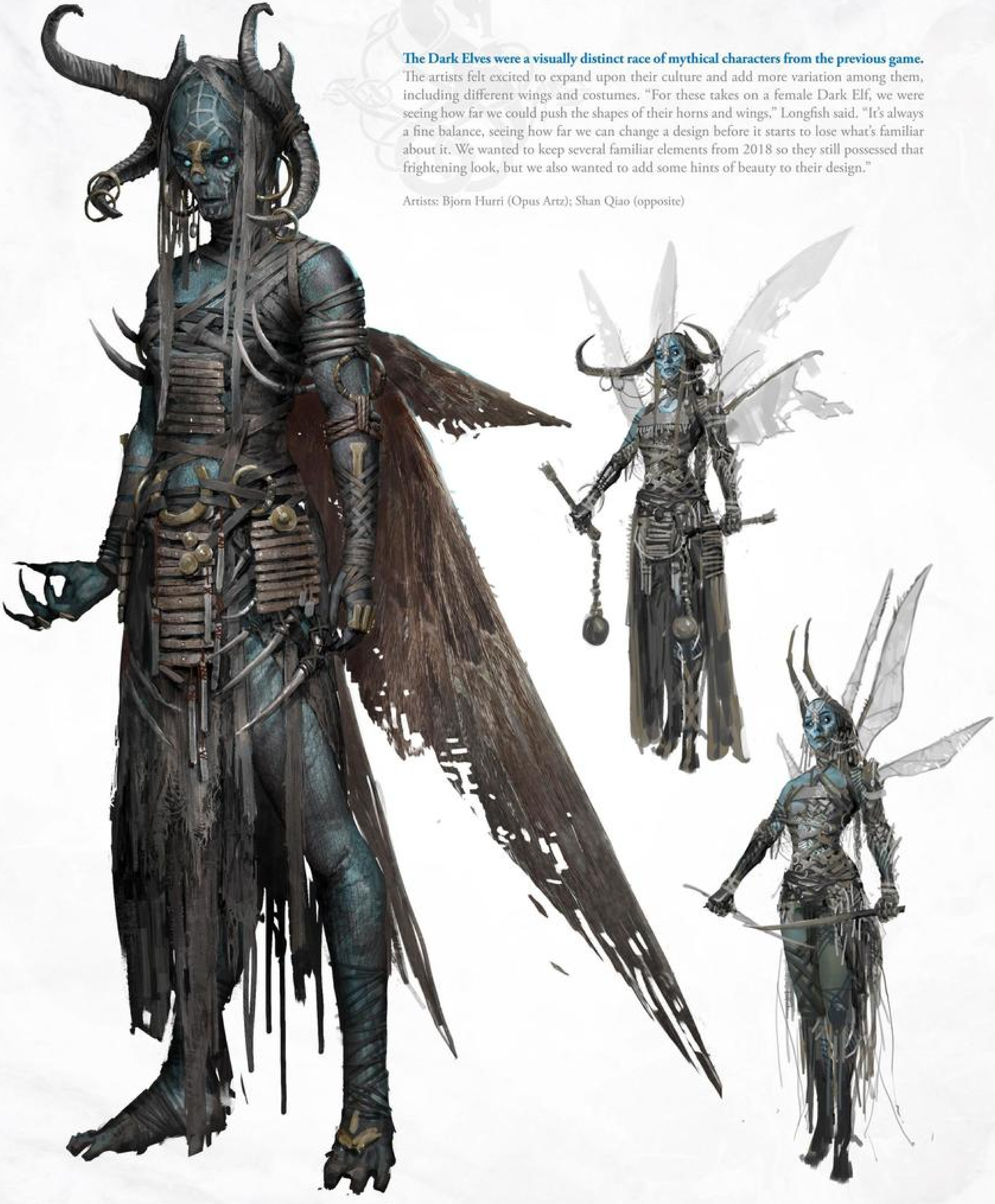
Whale-like creatures in Alfheim. Artist: Abe Taraky

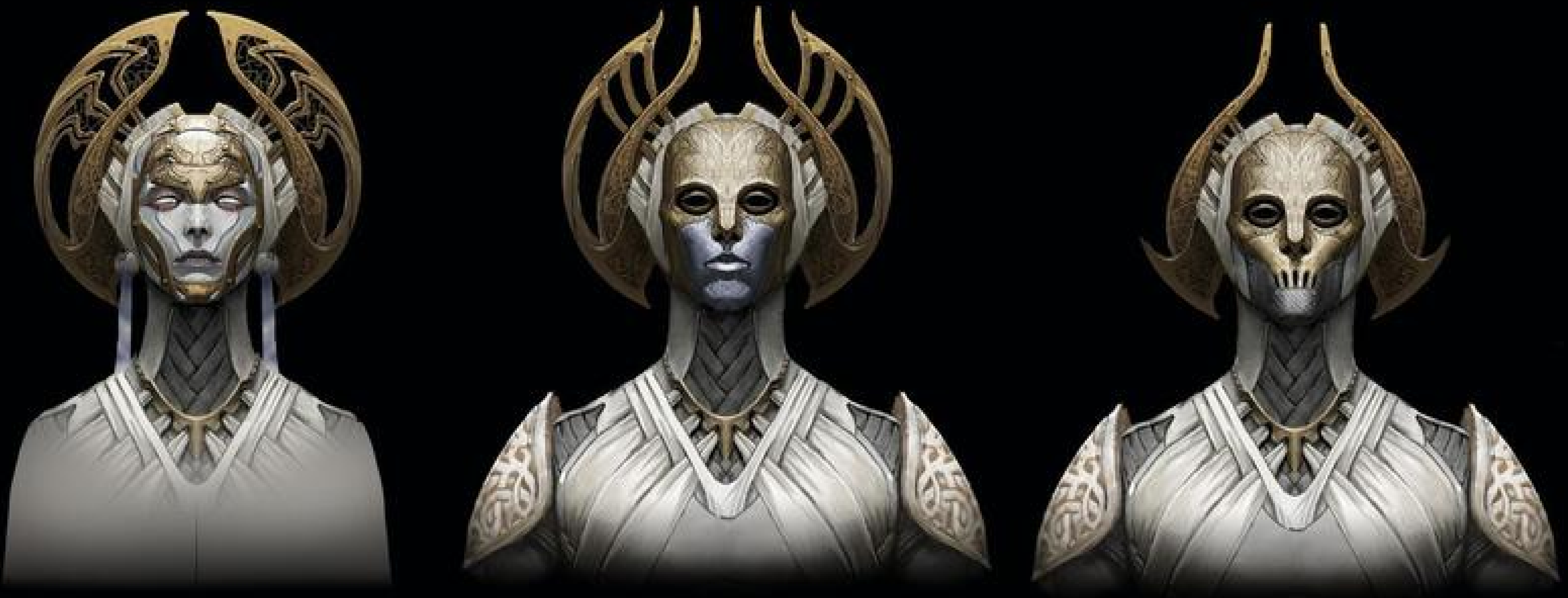


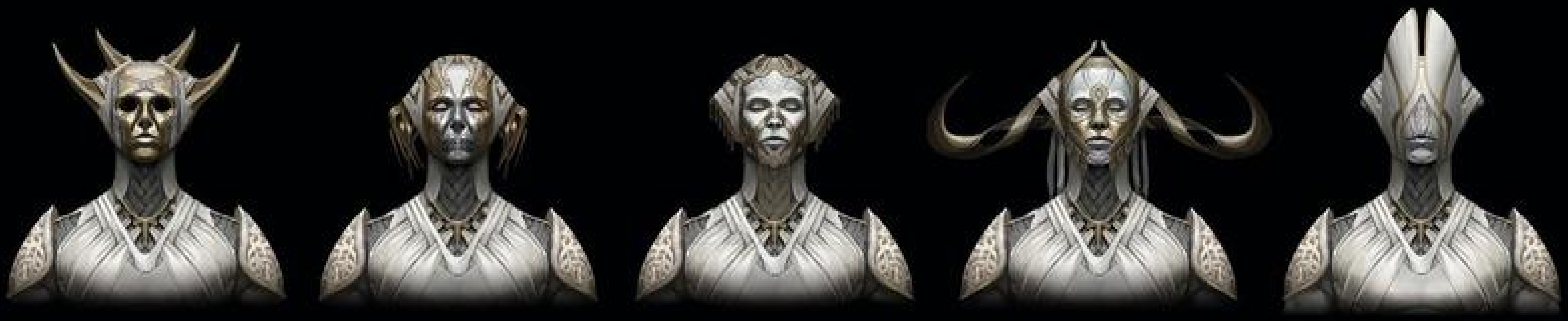
Alfheim cave concepts. Artist: Abe Taraky

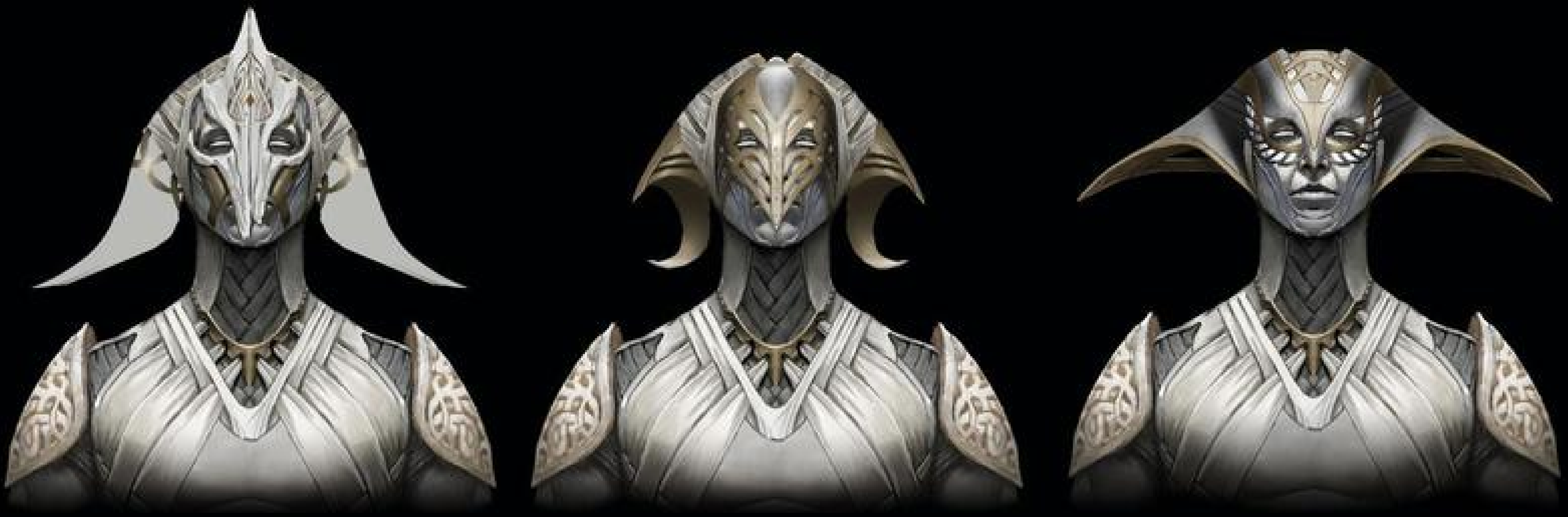
The Dark Elves were a visually distinct race of mythical characters from the previous game. The artists felt excited to expand upon their culture and add more variation among them, including different wings and costumes. "For these takes on a female Dark Elf, we were seeing how far we could push the shapes of their horns and wings," Longfish said. "It's always a fine balance, seeing how far we can change a design before it starts to lose what's familiar about it. We wanted to keep several familiar elements from 2018 so they still possessed that frightening look, but we also wanted to add some hints of beauty to their design."

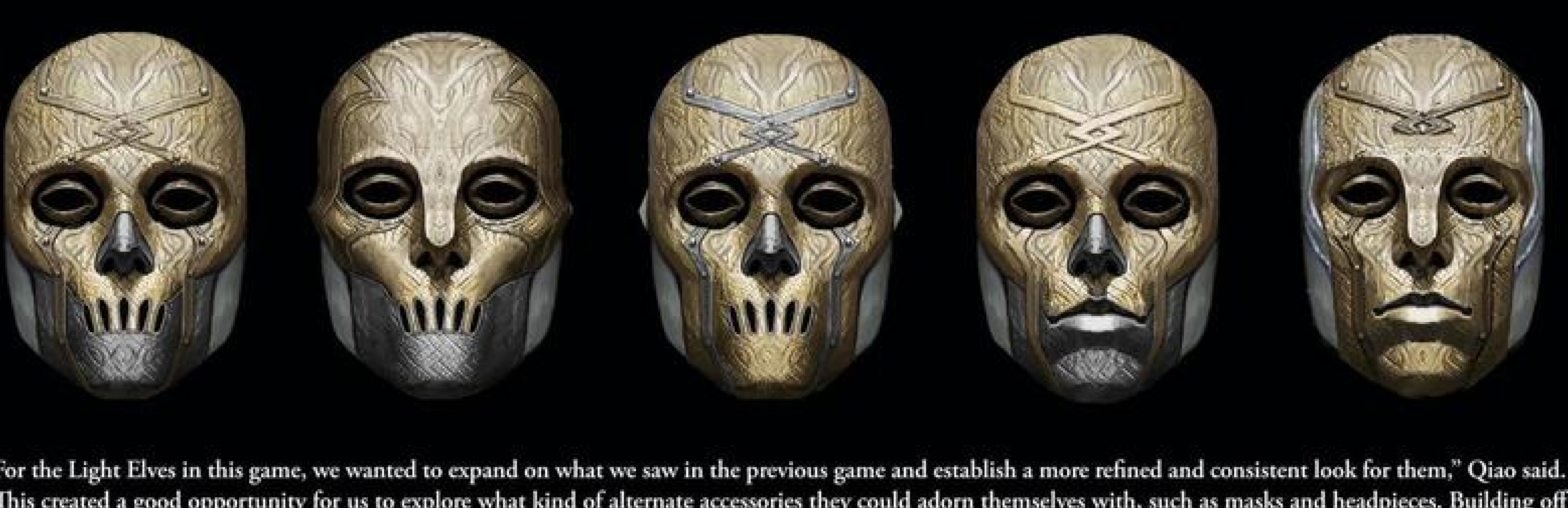
Artists: Bjorn Hurri (Opus Artz); Shan Qiao (opposite)











"For the Light Elves in this game, we wanted to expand on what we saw in the previous game and establish a more refined and consistent look for them," Qiao said. "This created a good opportunity for us to explore what kind of alternate accessories they could adorn themselves with, such as masks and headpieces. Building off the established elegant design language and aesthetic from Light Elves, there was a vast range of possibilities for us to explore."

Artist: Matteo Marjoram

II

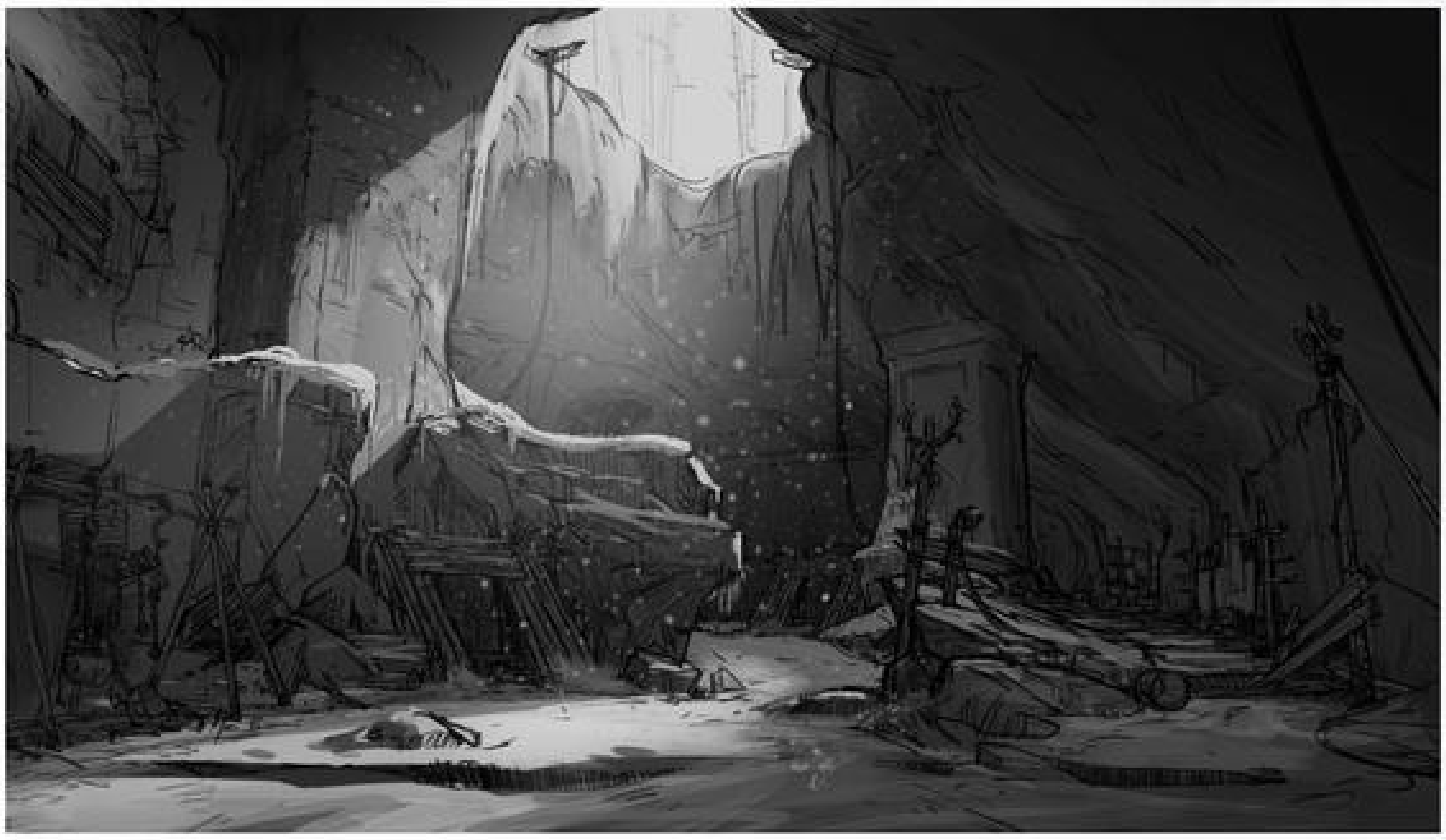
CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

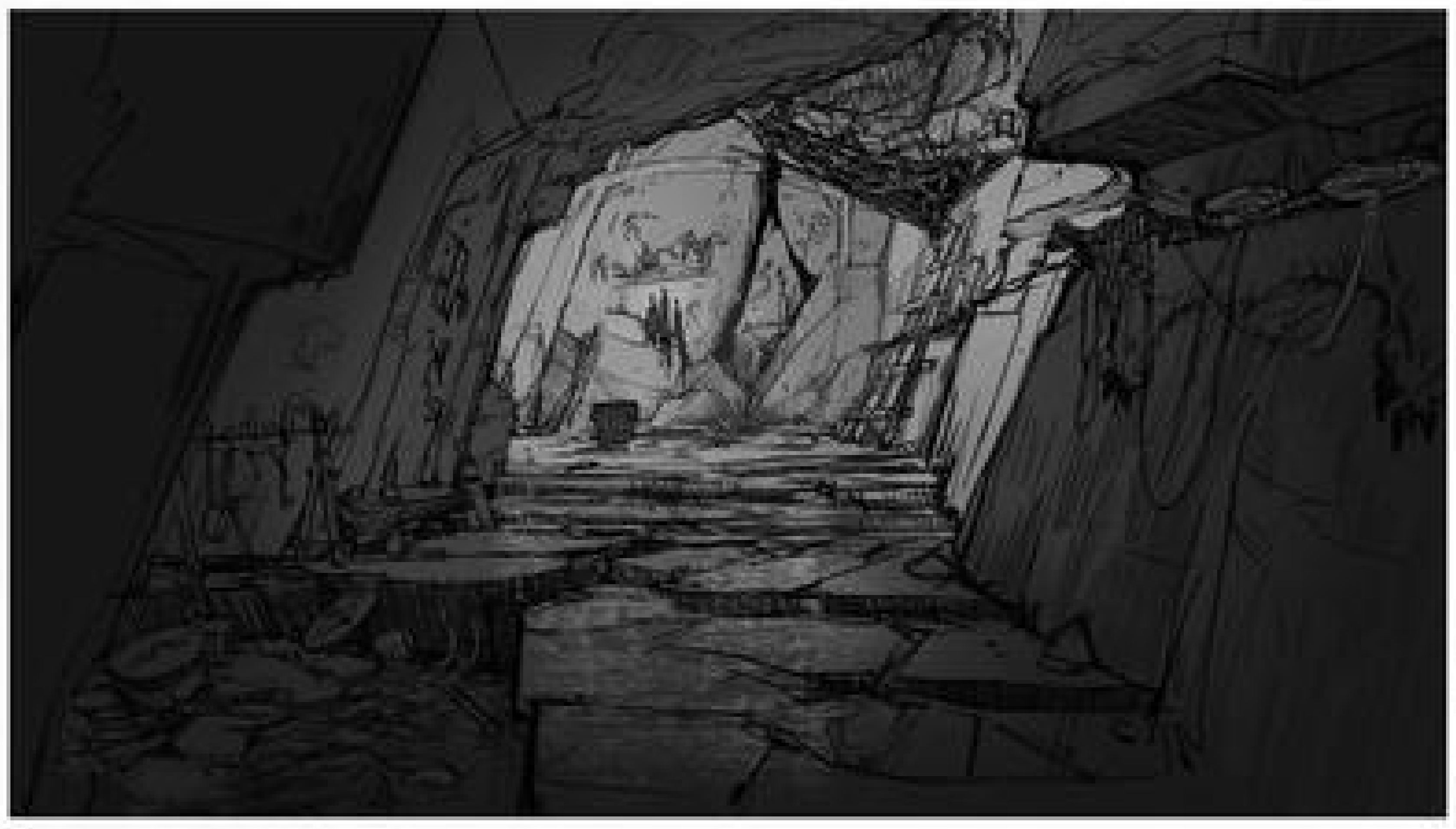
While successful in its own right, the previous game also served as a playable concept for *God of War Ragnarök*. The team knew how the game played and how it would look, so they focused on testing additional features—creating different puzzles, adding more combat variety, and increasing fidelity.

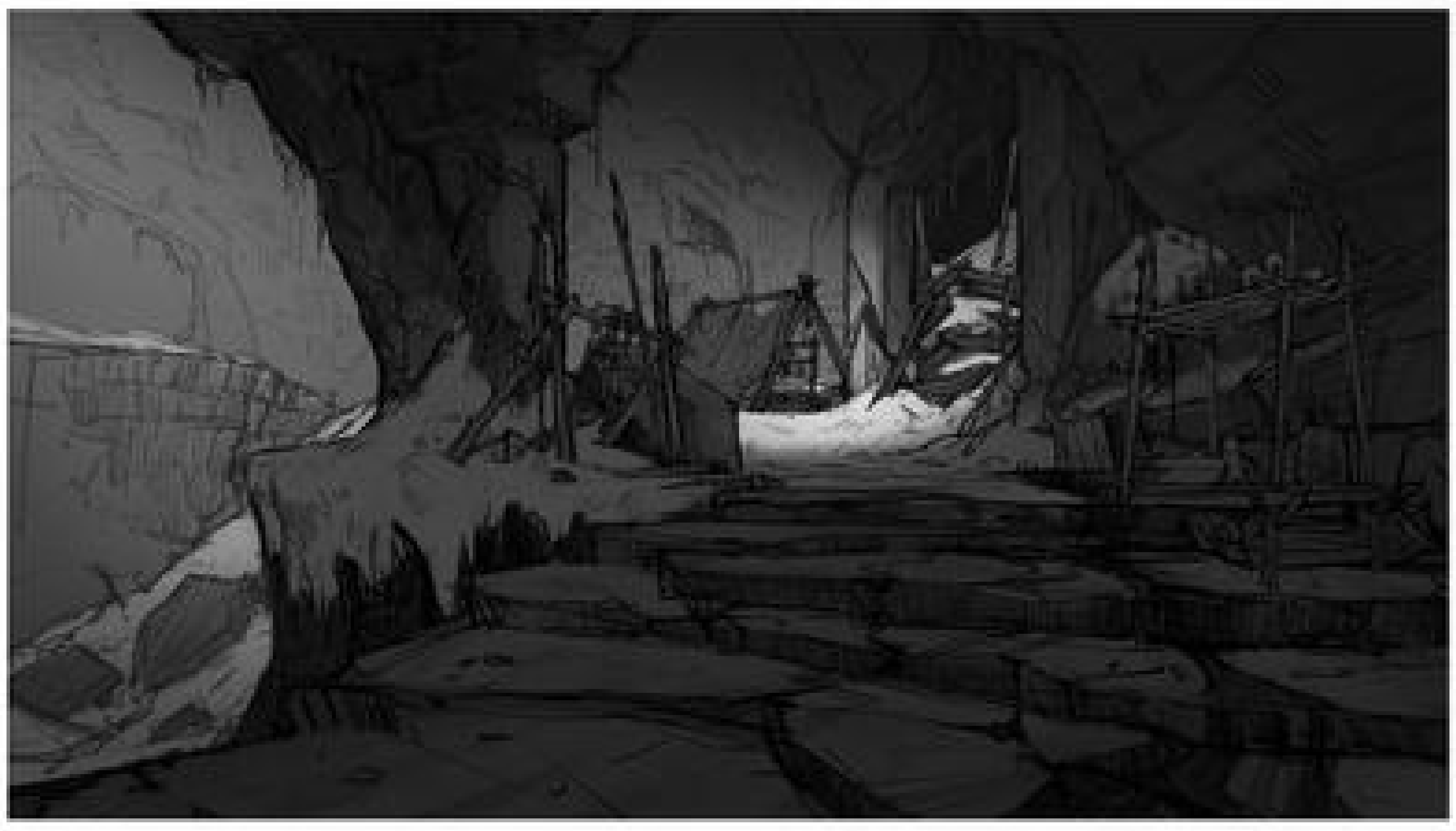
Artists stretched the game's boundaries with expanded realms and all-new locations. They had to build off of existing choices from the previous game, and designs made for a smaller setting in *God of War* had to scale to entire realms and make sense artistically for the expanding story.

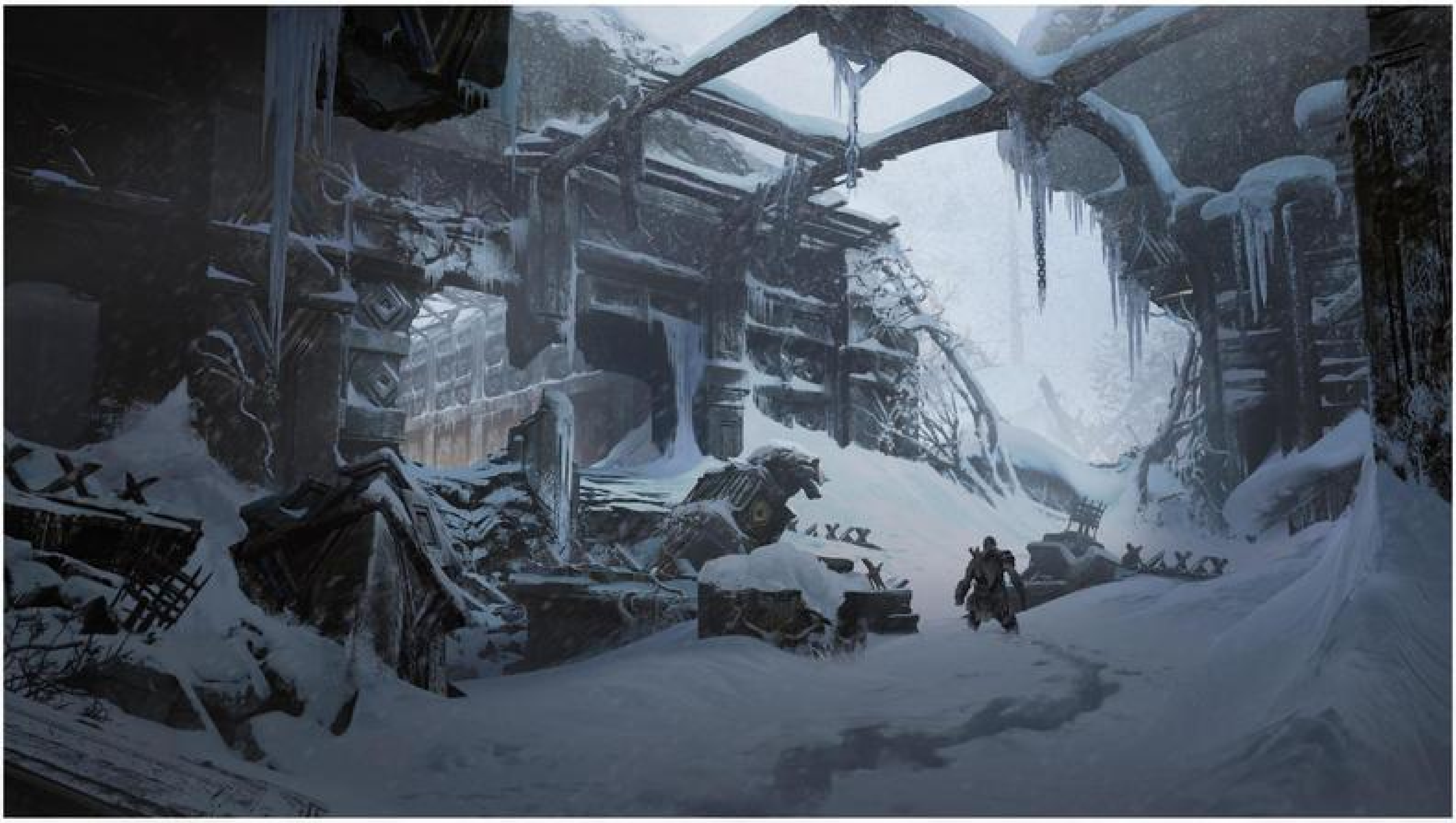
Throughout development, establishing a strong identity for each realm remained foremost in the team's minds. "It was really important to us that when you watch somebody playing the game, you know that it's *God of War* instantly, and you also know where they are, what realm, or what character they're with," lead environment concept artist Luke Berliner said. "That identity is something that we worked really hard to make unique."

Fimbulwinter drastically transforms the realms, battering them with frigid precipitation. With the game revisiting previously seen *God of War* locations in Midgard, the team could illustrate the tremendous impact the storm has had on the landscape. Established environments received entirely new and different concepts, this time with the distinctive textures and surfaces of snowdrifts and icicles covering everything. It made familiar places play differently and look unique.

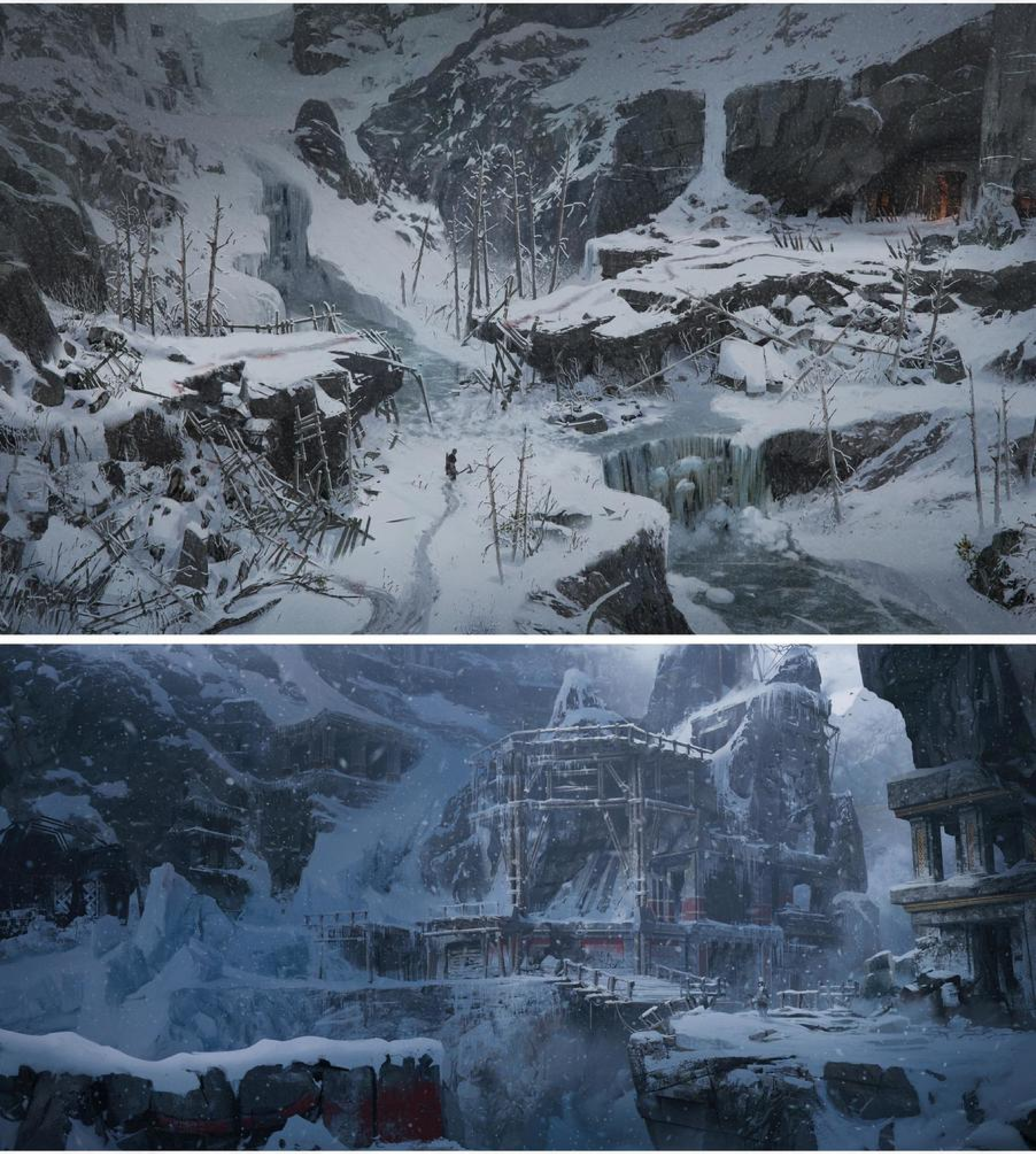






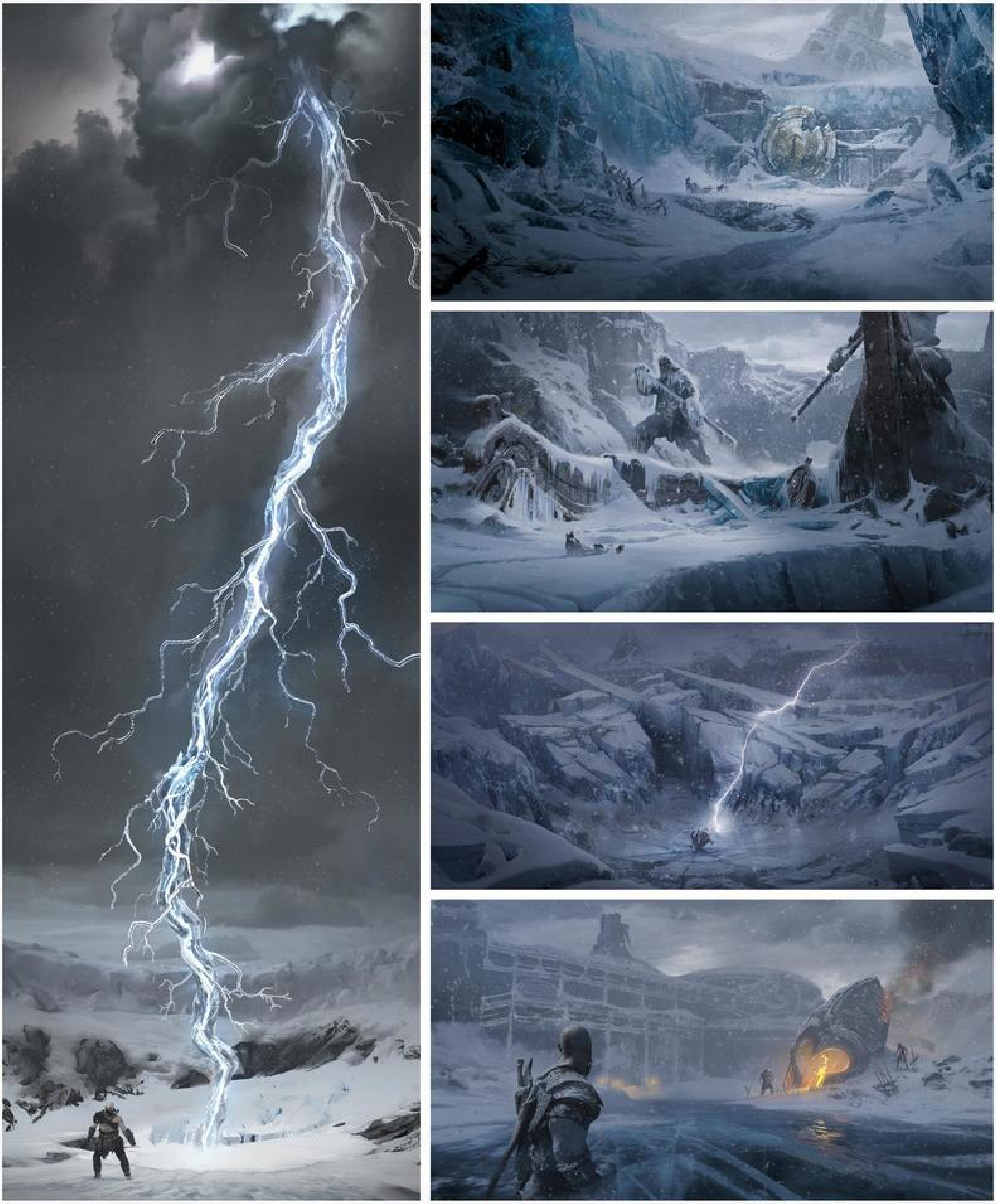


Displaying the impact of Fimbulwinter. Artist: Matteo Marjoram

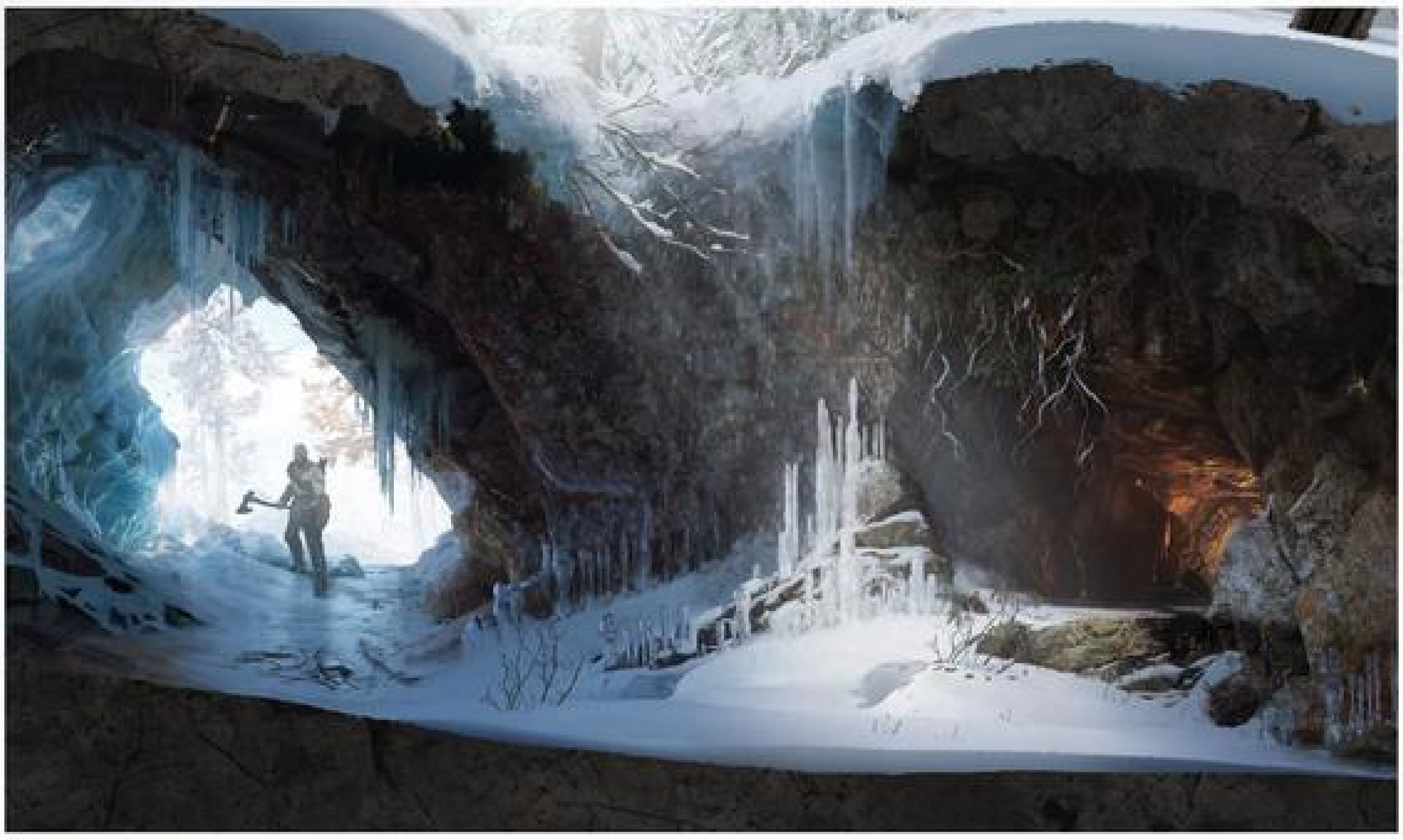


The effects of Fimbulwinter in Midgard. Artist: Matteo Marjoram

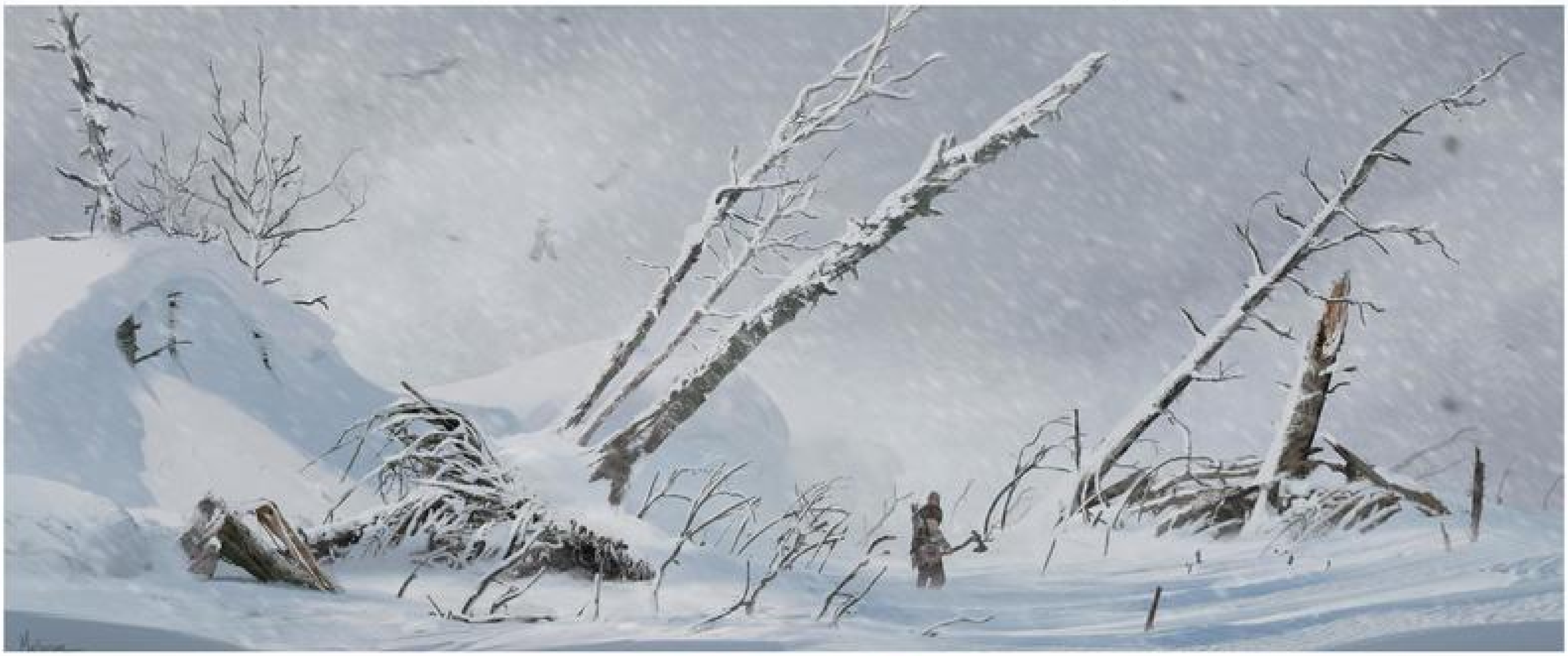
Concepts for the frozen Lake of Nine. Artist: Matteo Marjoram

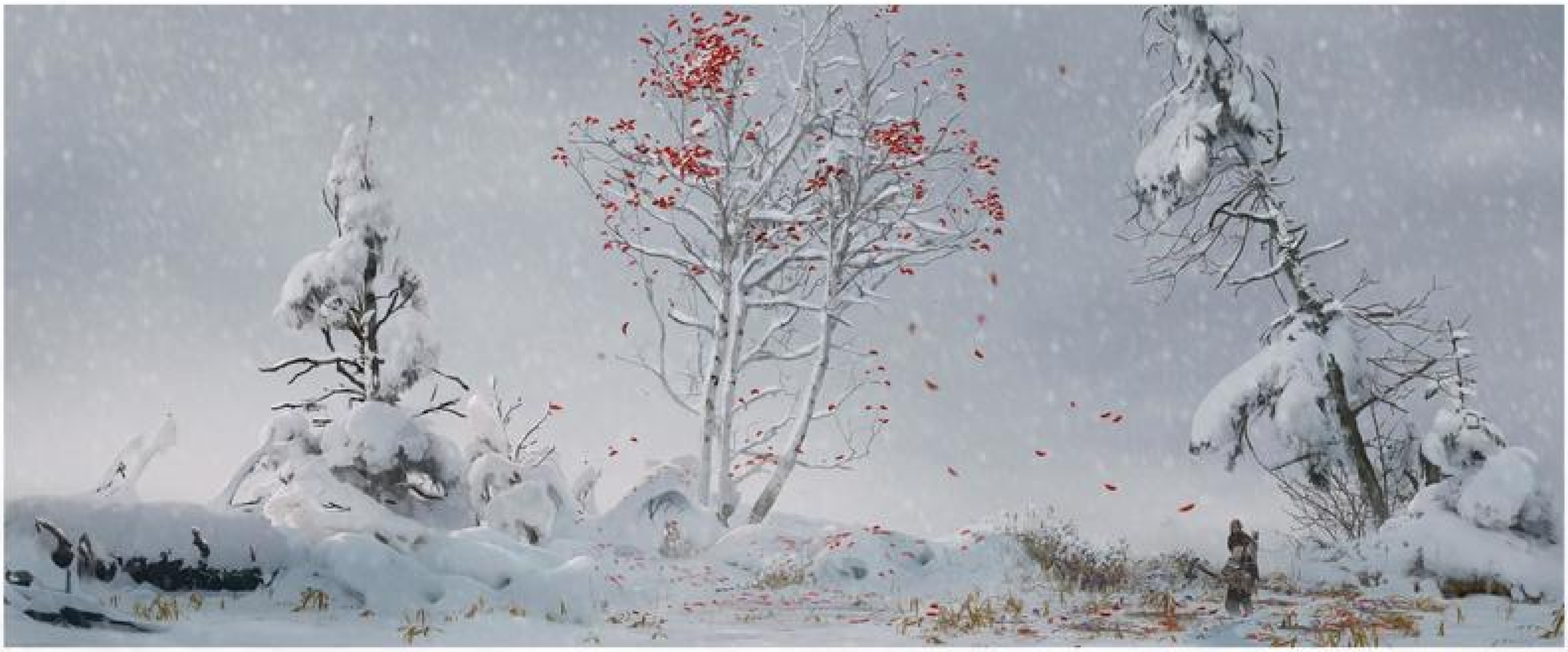


"Seeing the Lake of Nine frozen and the impact this has had on Týr's Temple was another opportunity for us to show the consequences of Fimbulwinter," Berliner said. "It also provided opportunities to crack open the ice and show a little more of what was once under the water. We also were able to push the contrast of the lake; one side being more fractured and the other being smoother gave an opportunity to help players get their bearings as they explored a once-familiar place."



The team made foliage guides that collected the copious plant designs for *Ragnarök*. Here, artist Matteo Marjoram illustrated concepts for Midgard to show what the trees and plants would look like beneath the snow. The environment team created these diagrams for most realms, and it helped them push the biodiversity of the plants further than they otherwise would have.

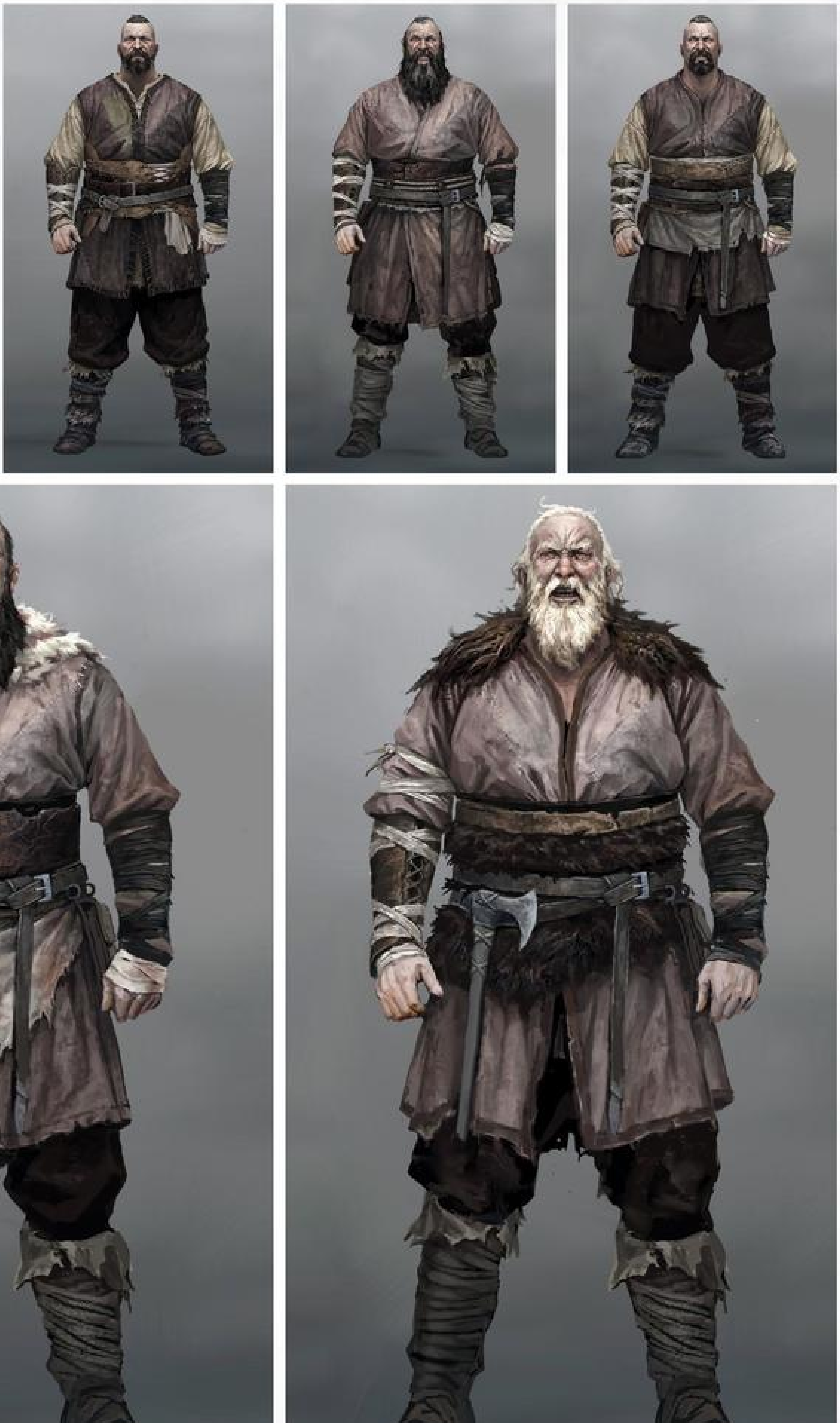




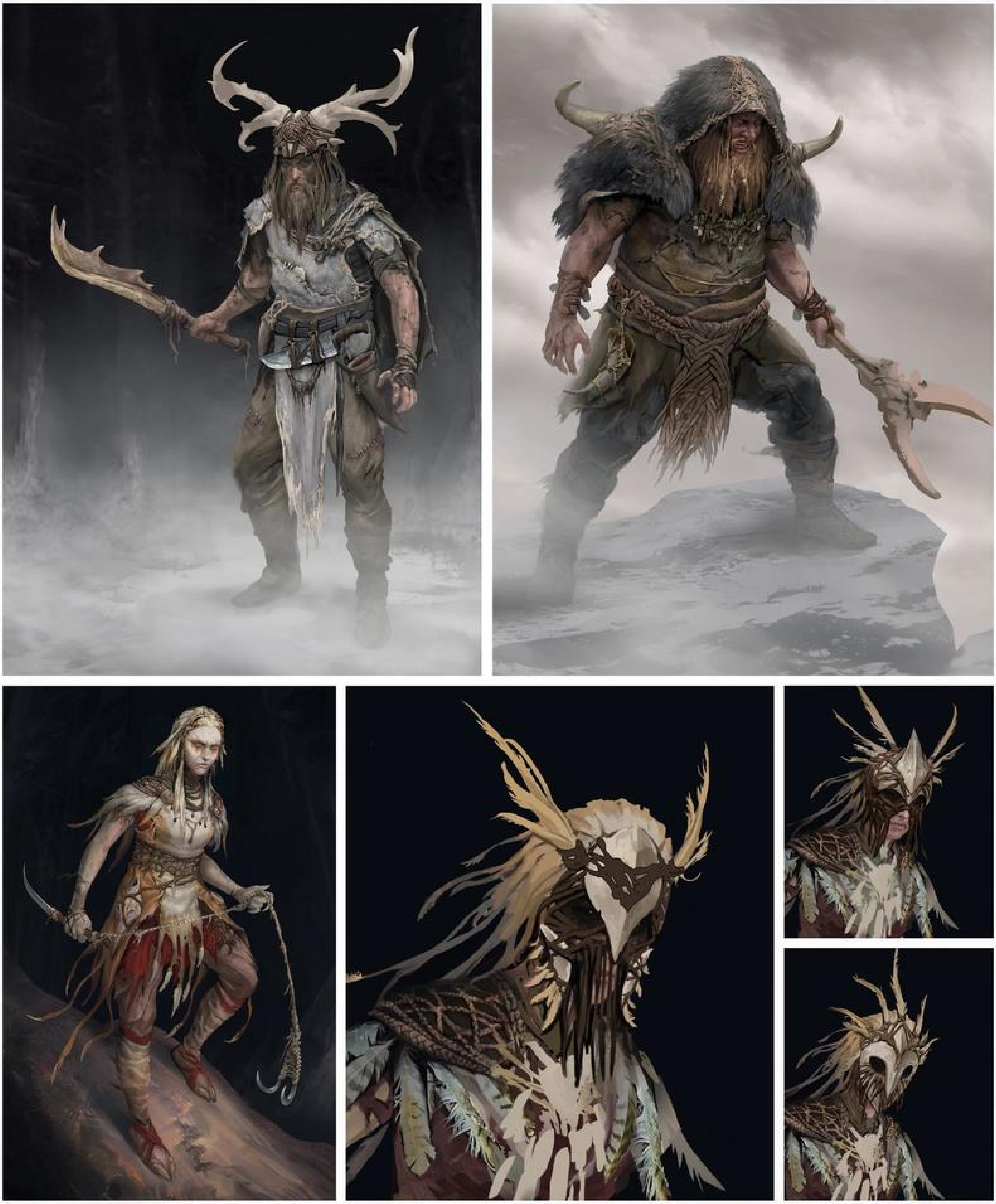
Plants pushing through Midgard's snow. Artist: Matteo Marjoram

The art team wanted the heavy bandit class to have a consistent look but with a larger frame. However, they wanted to avoid making the heavy class look like bodybuilders, which wouldn't have fit the realistic aesthetic of the game. Qiao noted that details like the frostbite on the skin and the wrappings on the costume helped to show how long the bandits have been in the wild.

Various options for the heavy bandit class. Artist: Shan Qiao

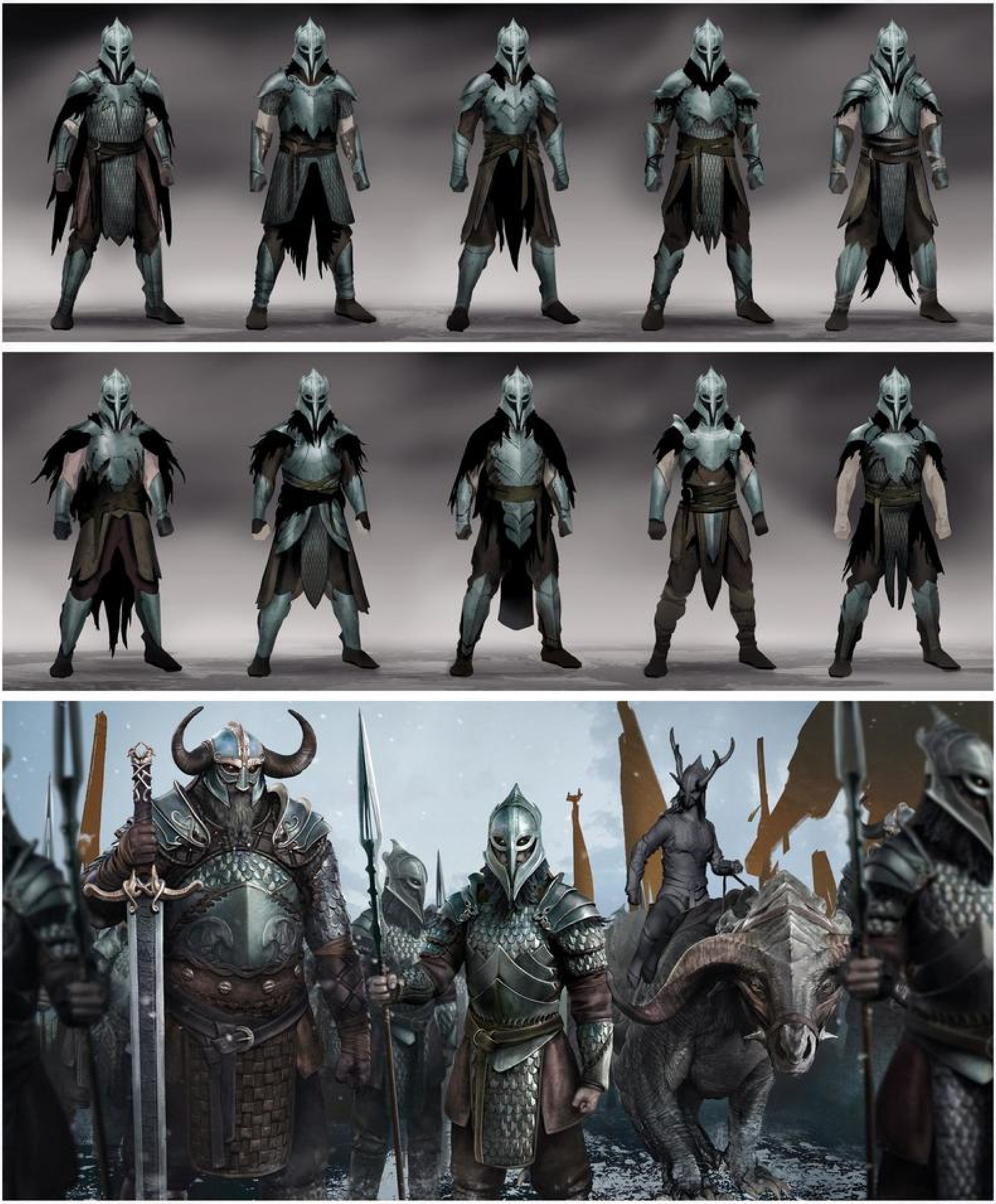


Exploring berserker blood states. Artist: Yefim Kligerman



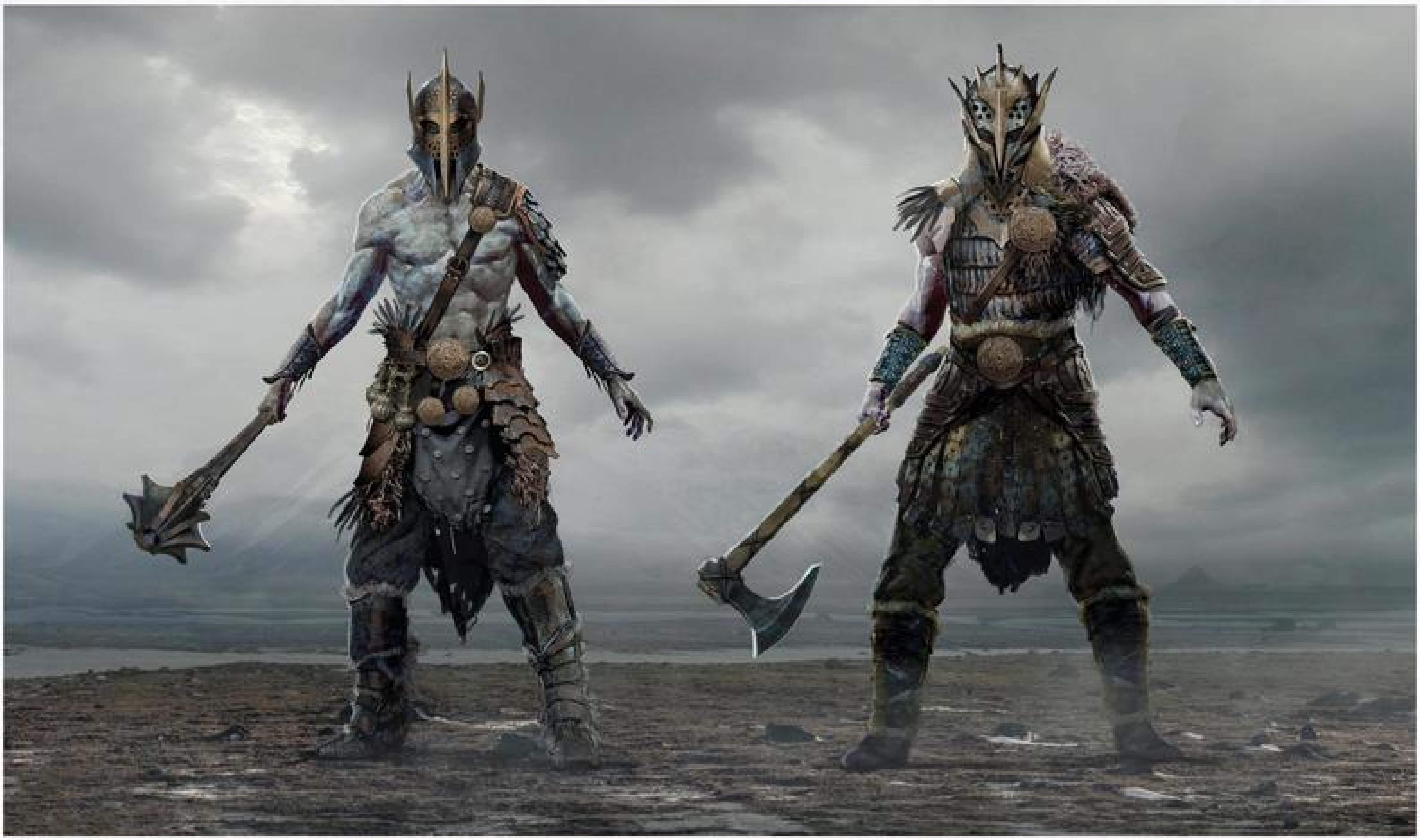
At one point the berserkers had "blood states," where they'd consume animal blood and power up, so the artists explored separate blood state variants for the berserkers. The ox version of the berserker had giant horns protruding from his shoulders. Kligerman said, "The idea was that he'd charge at you like an ox and knock you down. His weapon also has those ox horns that he uses to keep you at a distance and stay out of range of your melee weapons."

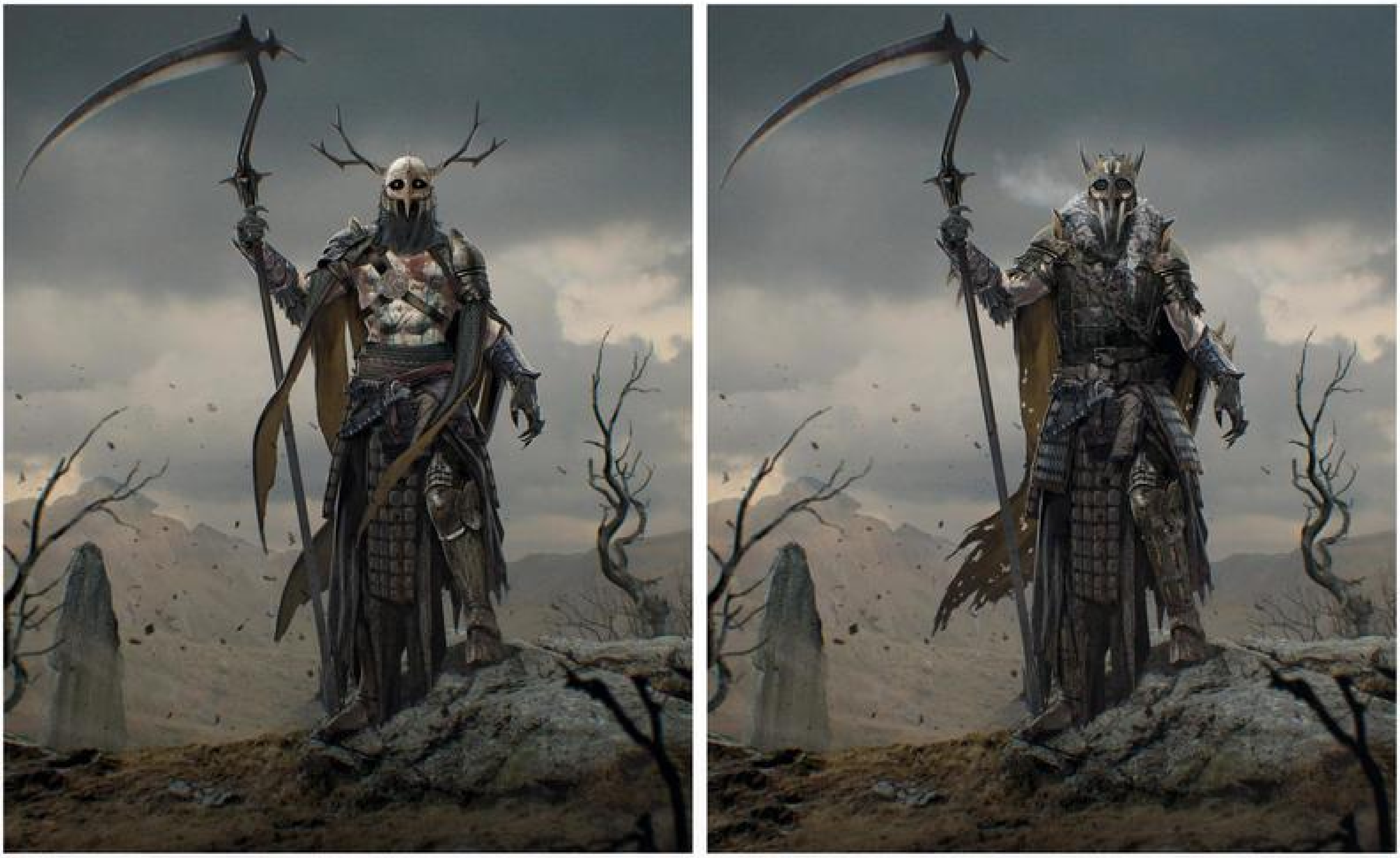
Einherjar armor concepts. Artist: Yefim Kligerman (top); Rafael Grassetti (bottom); Dela Longfish (opposite)



"We knew that the Einherjar would be a massive class and likely the most seen enemy in the game. With that in mind we had to maximize their variety," Kligerman explained. "Luckily, they're armored, so we had that range to work with, going from completely bare chested to covered in heavy armor, and you'll see that we designed almost every possible option among those."

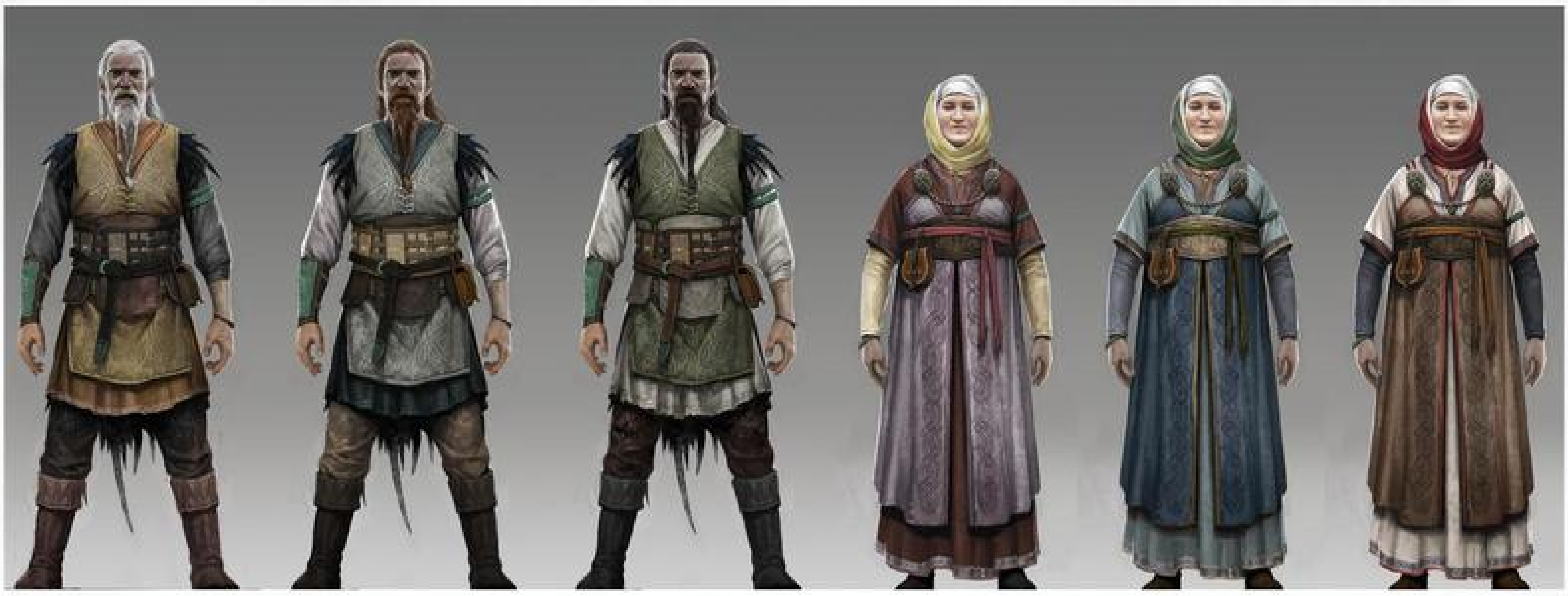
Einherjar weapon ideas. Artist: Karl Lindberg

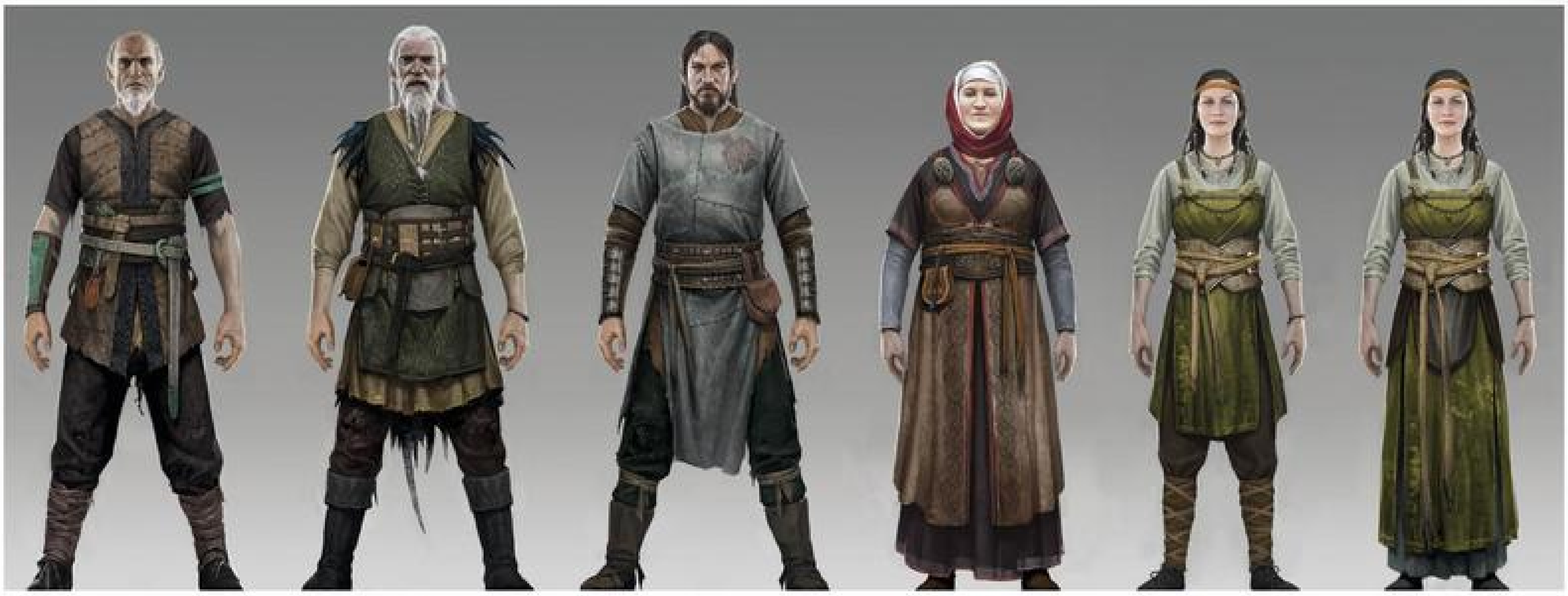




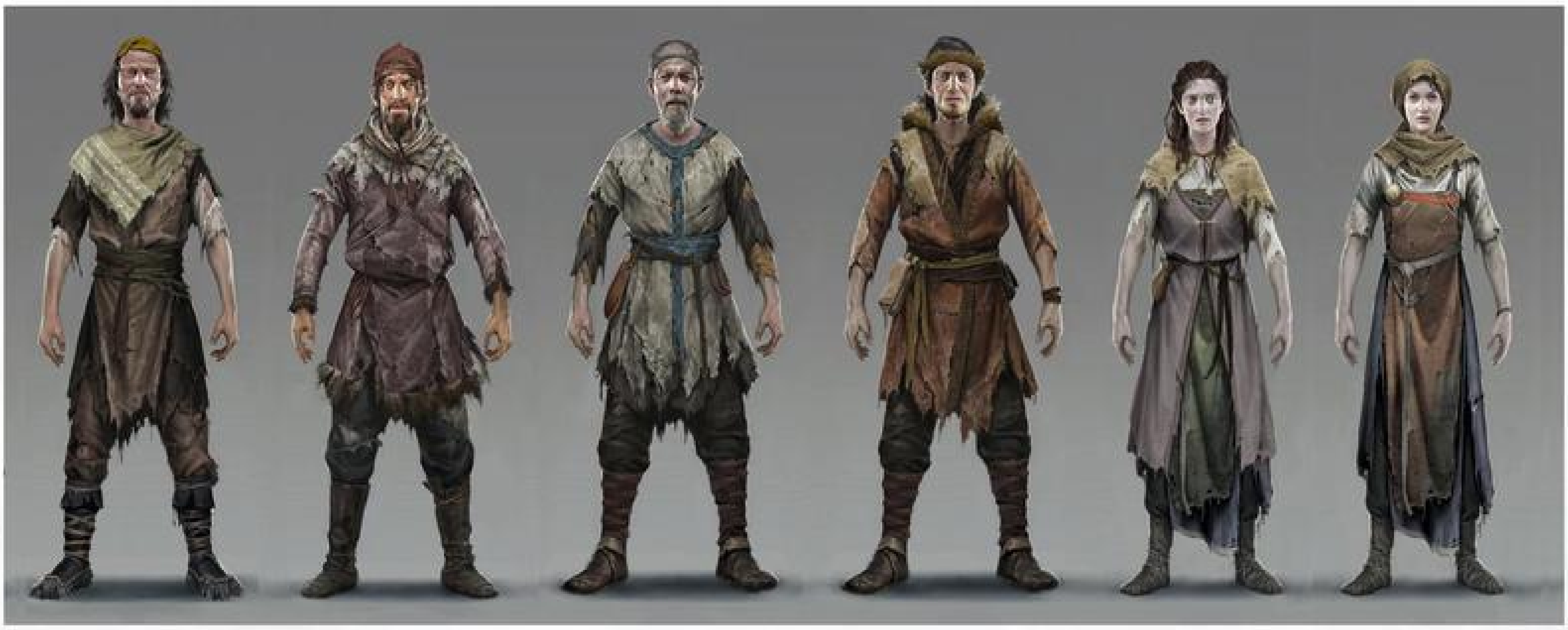
The Einherjar elite are not to be trifled with. Artist Karl Lindberg's designs for this class expanded the visual language and created an even more frightening look for the enemies. Mythology explains that the Valkyries trained the Einherjar elite, making them the deadliest warriors in Odin's army. They use the same scythe weapon as the Valkyries, and the winged motif of their designs and weapons connects them visually to Odin.

Civilian designs. Artist: Shan Qiao



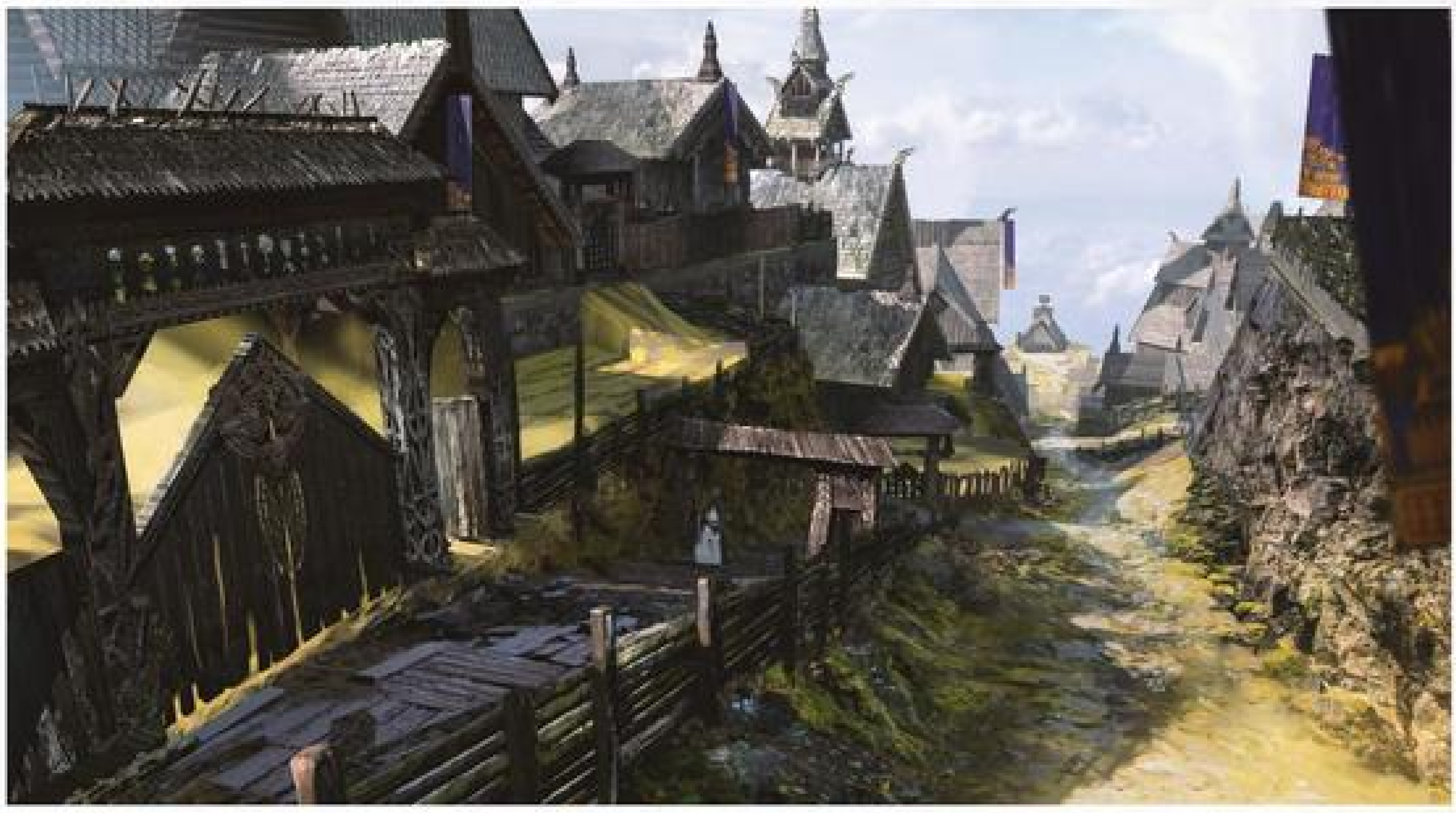


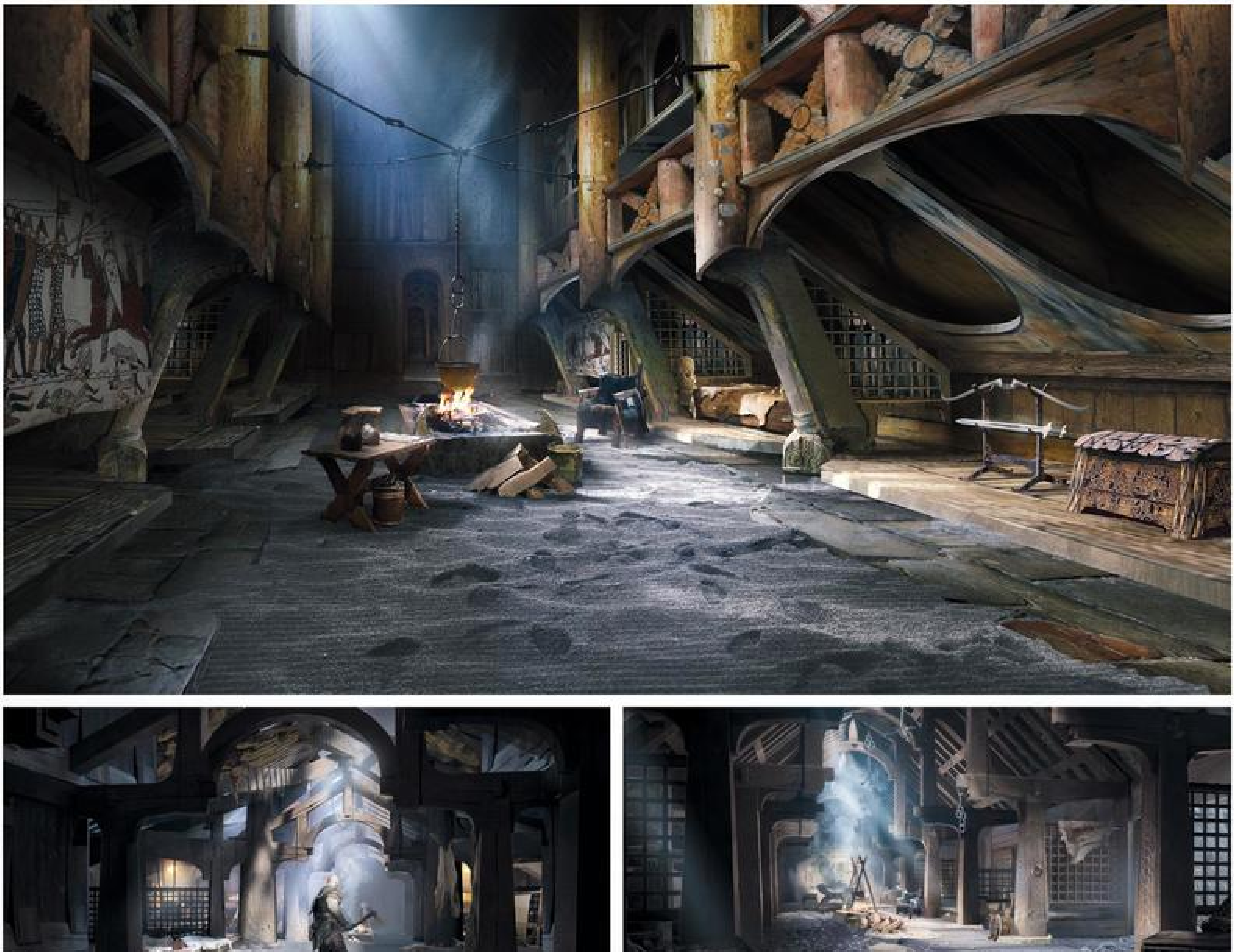
"As inhabitants of Asgard, the Aesir civilians wore more decorative outfits," Qiao said. "The material of the clothing needed to be well produced, and the color selection for these characters included the blue-green look from the Aesir. We also wanted to make sure that these civilians were not seen as enemies."

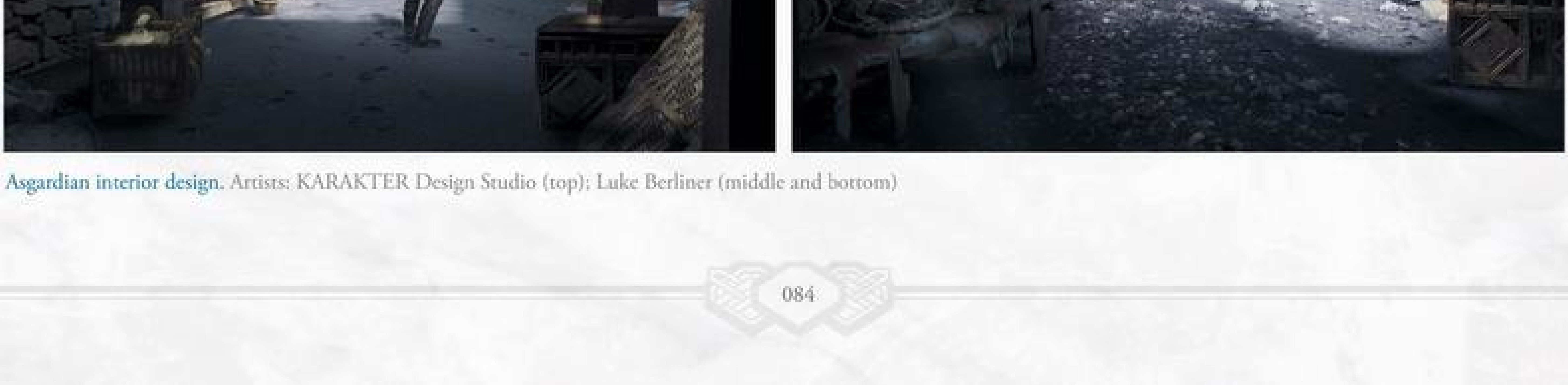


"On the other hand," Qiao continued, "the Midgardian civilians looked more broken—as they have suffered through a lot—which is reflected in their skinny bodies, torn clothes, and the overall stressed expression. A clear separation for these two groups of people was very important."

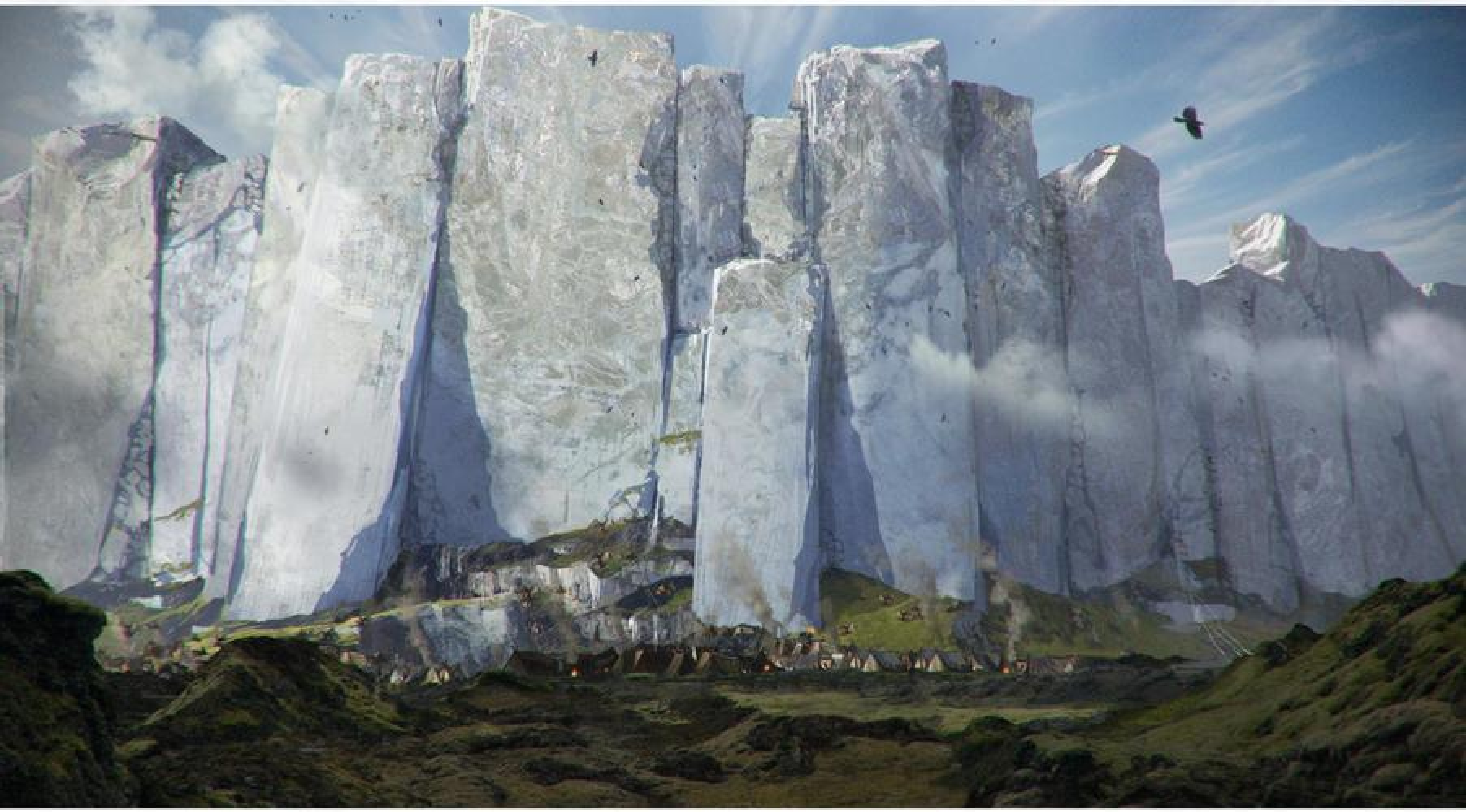
As a more familiar realm, Asgard came with greater expectations. Berliner said, "We had intentionally avoided using more classic Viking architecture, knowing this would be the place we could employ that more widely known look. We still couldn't resist putting our own twist on it, working out where we could incorporate the raven motif." They treated shingles as if they were feathers and curved the peaks of houses like beaks or wings.

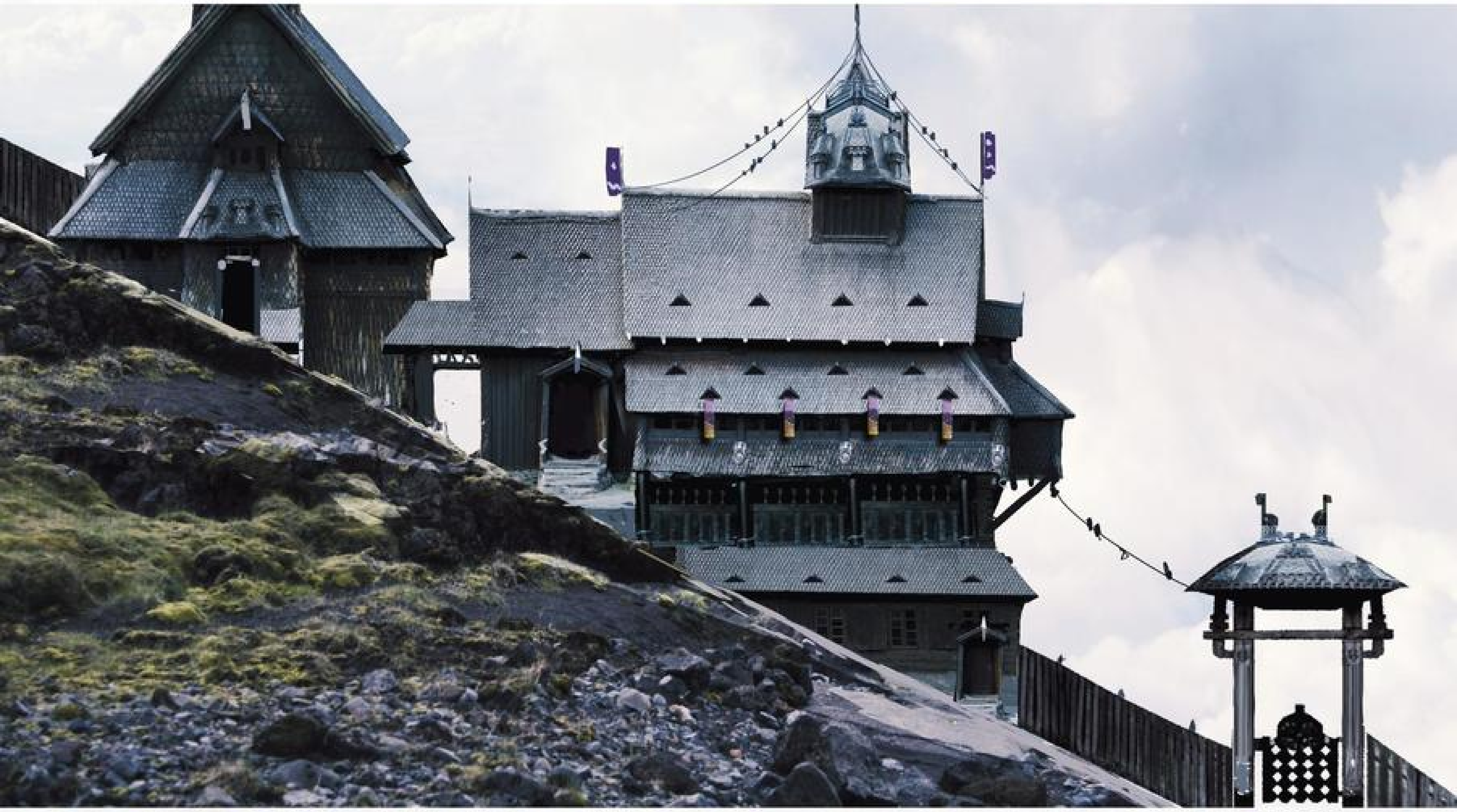






Asgardian interior design. Artists: KARAKTER Design Studio (top); Luke Berliner (middle and bottom)

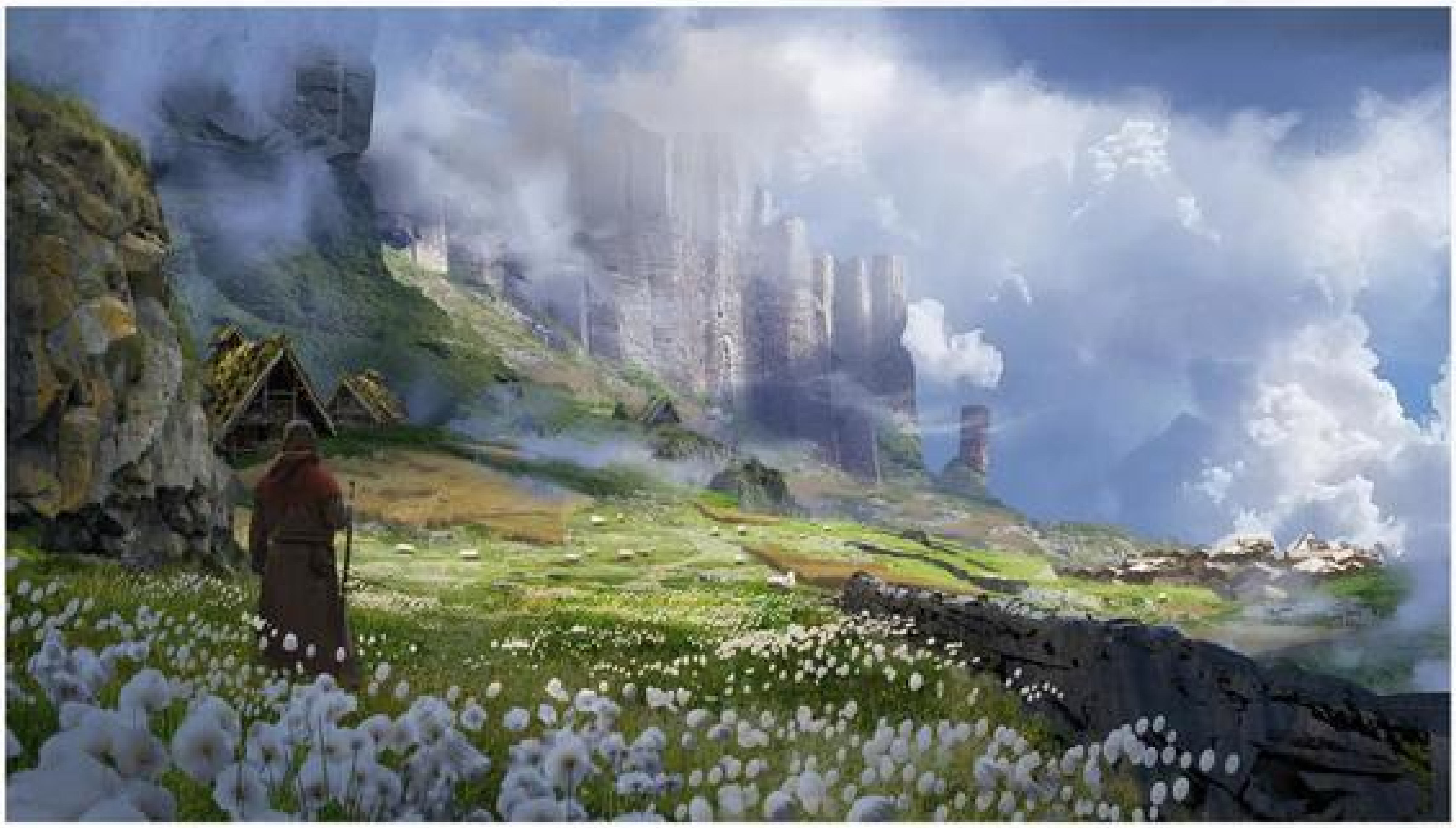


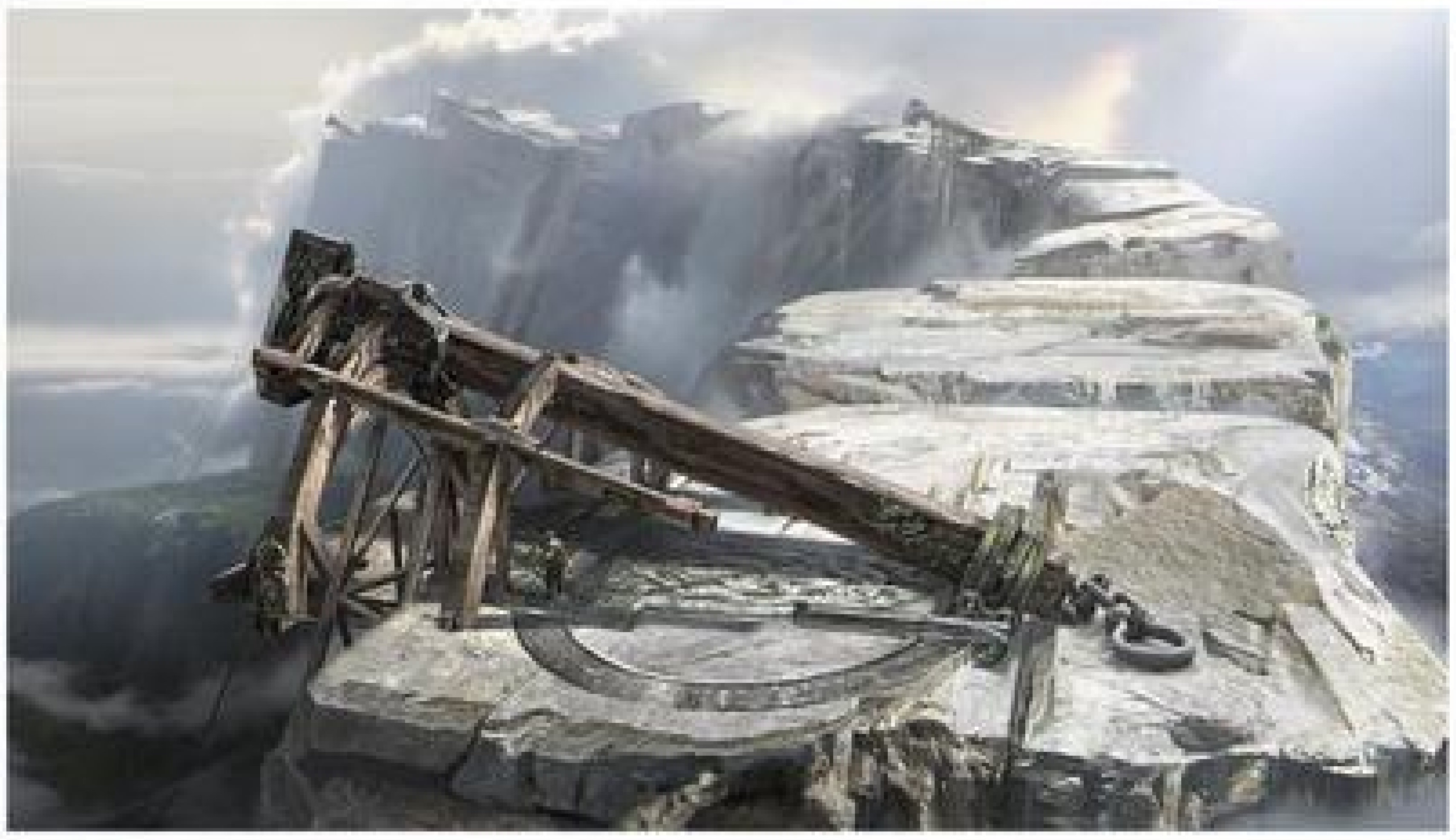


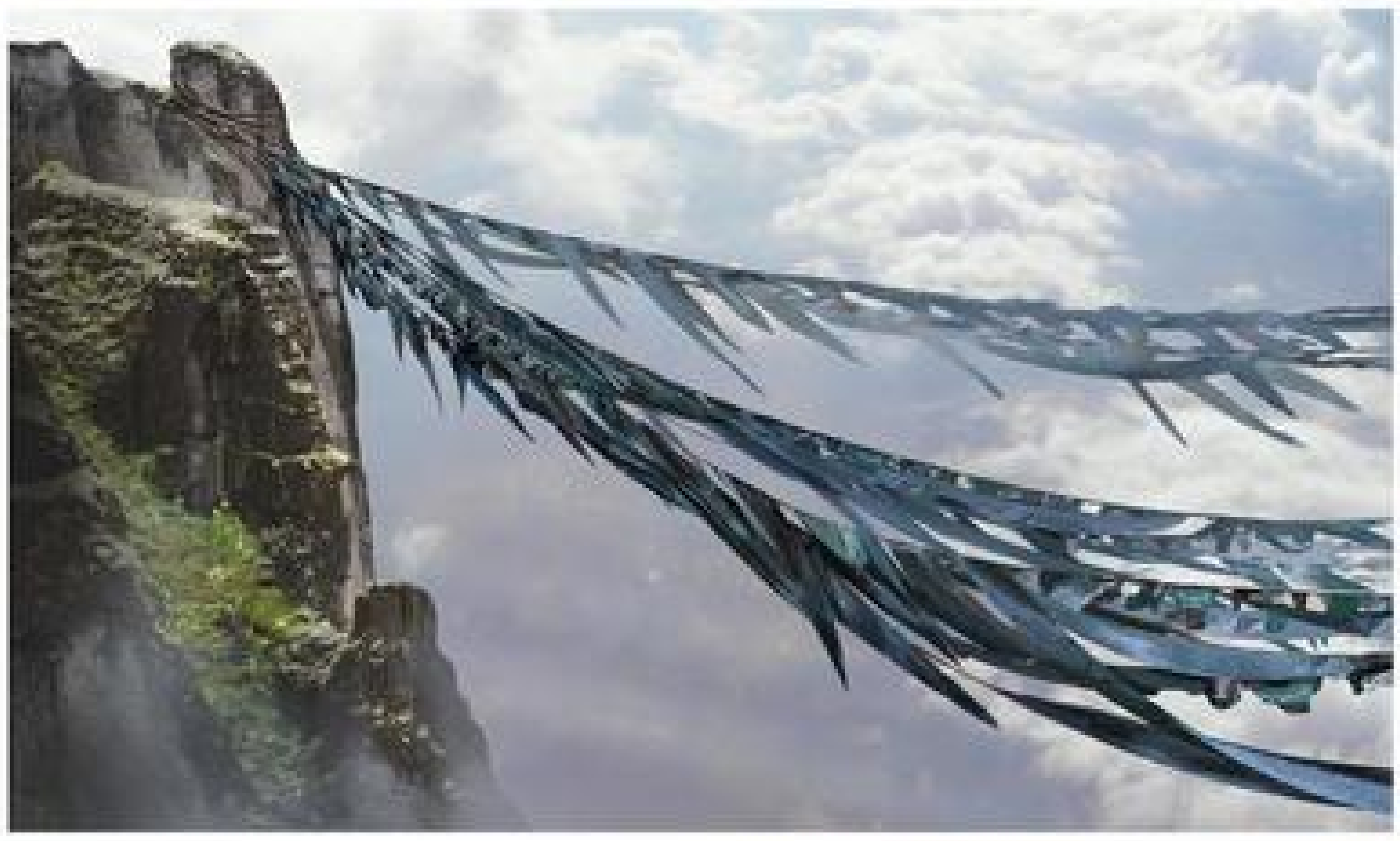
Asgardian residential architecture. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio

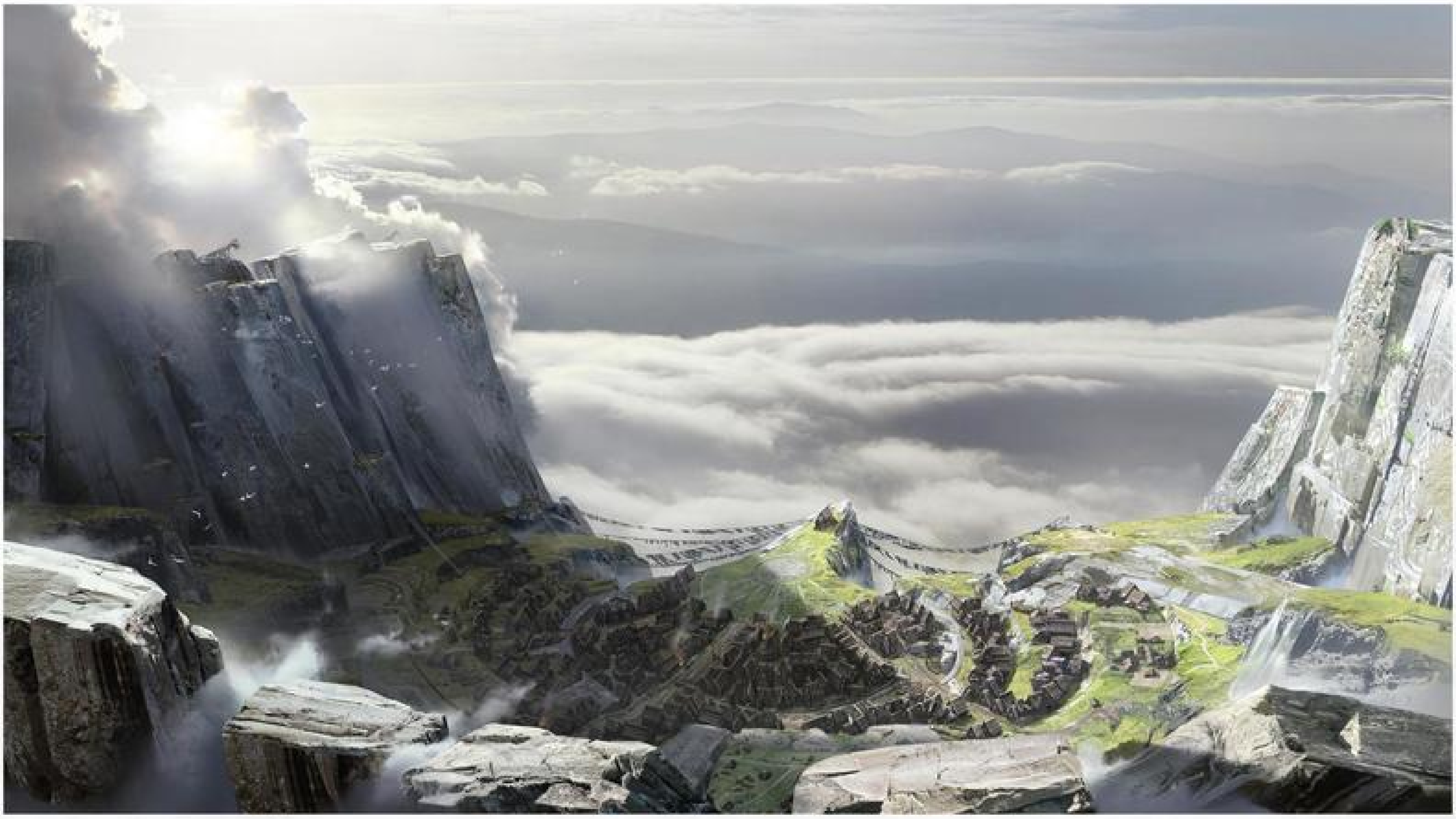
Director Eric Williams was passionate about having Odin's house be placed at the edge of a cliff. "It was almost like the stage of an amphitheater where Odin could hold court," Berliner explained. "This also functioned as a barricade, allowing the city to act as a shield. Given that the house was out on a cliff, we organized the city and surrounding landscape to mimic the raven idea: the house being the head of the raven, with the city streets spreading out like wings."

Vistas near Odin's home. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Abe Taraky (middle and bottom)

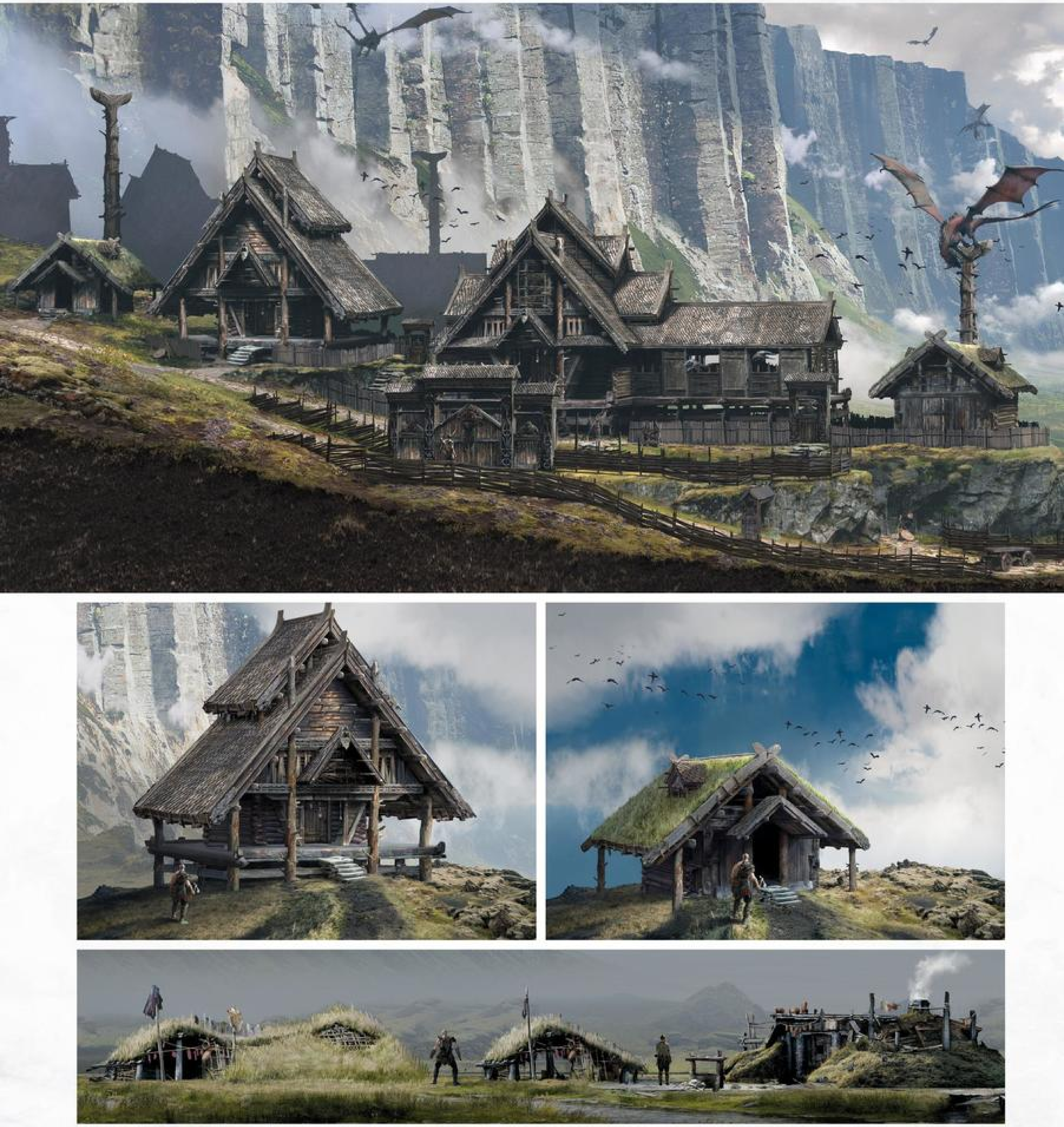








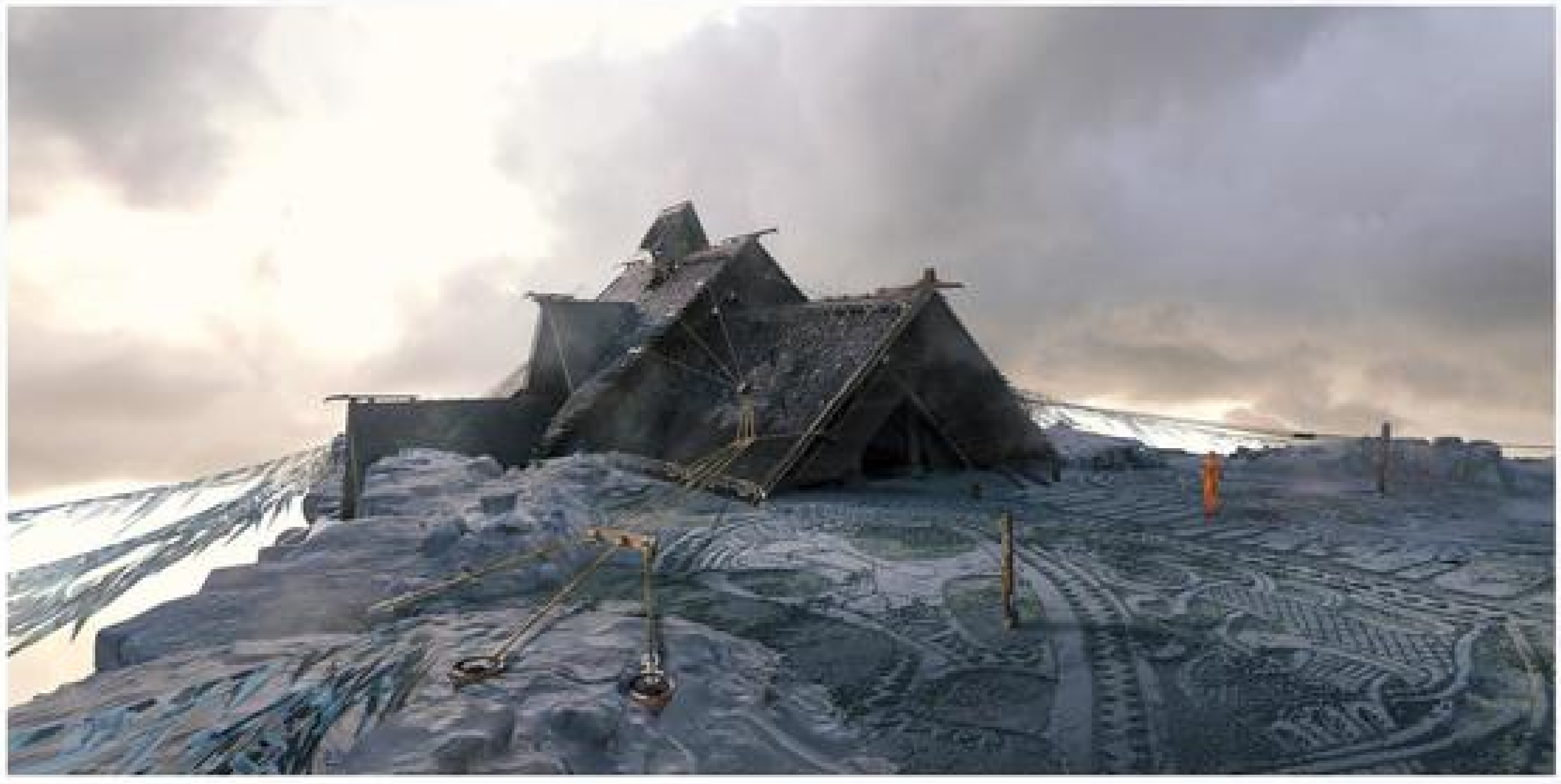
Exploring different Asgardian home styles. Artists: Mark Castanon (top and middle); Ryan Hong (bottom)

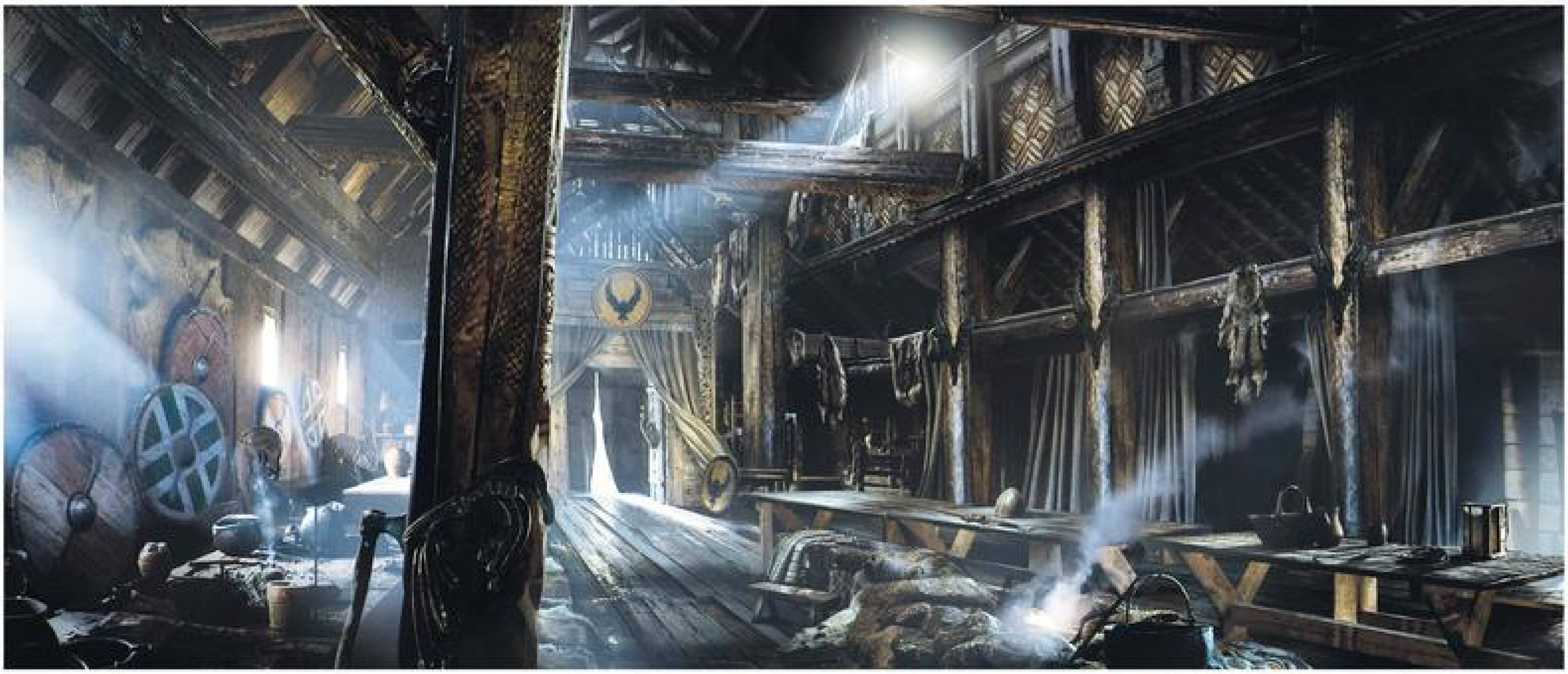


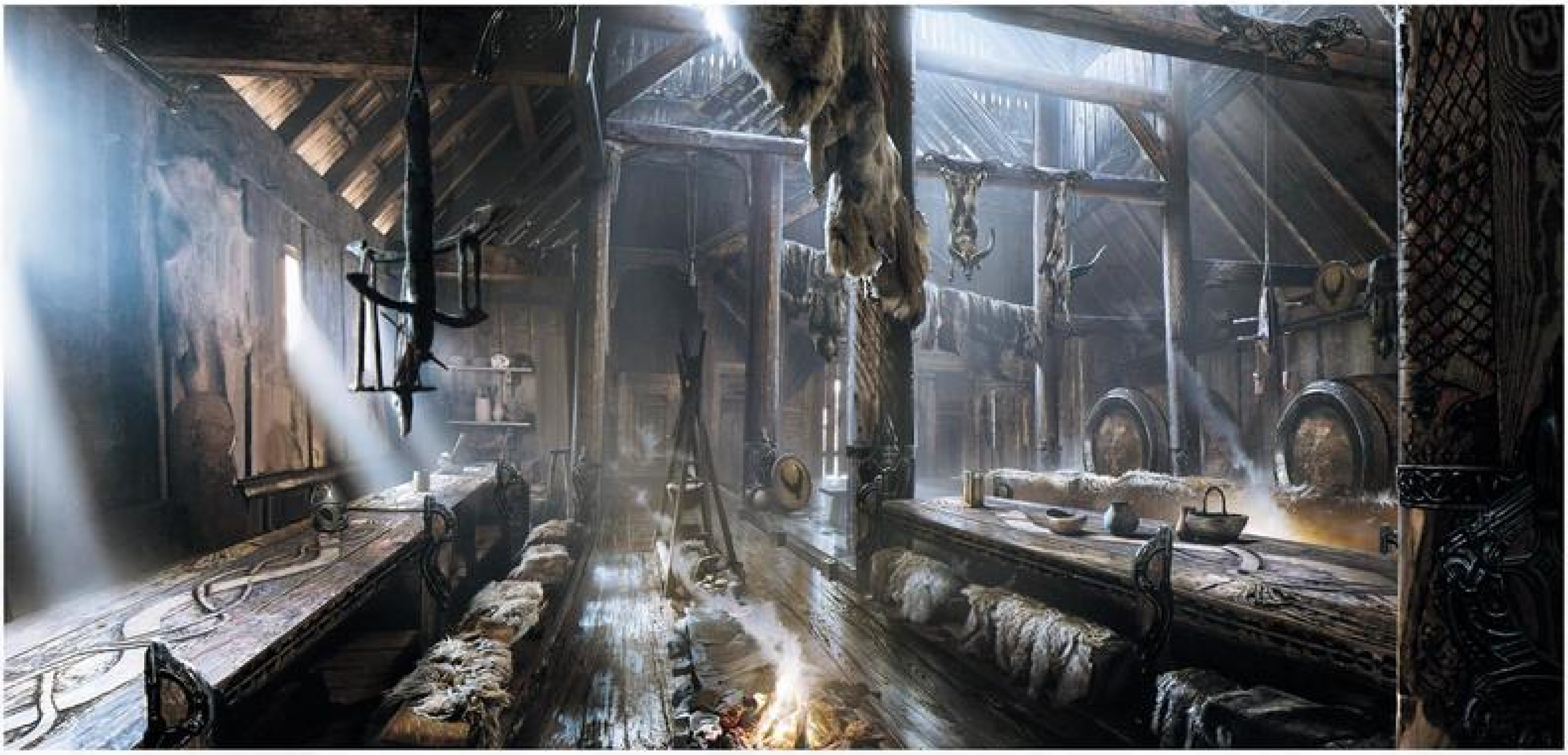
The homes in Asgard reference Viking architecture with angular, sloping roofs. Here, the environment artists experimented with those roofs to differentiate them from those in other realms. They tried stacked roofs, to add another element of verticality, and grass-covered roofs. The team also explored making the Asgardian homes more incorporated into the earth and almost entirely covered by dirt and plants.

Odin's abode was described as a dingy hangout space, unassuming and far from the ornate godly spaces the team had designed over the years. Early in development, Odin's house was often referred to as a "biker bar" because of its unruly appearance. The team worked to communicate that state while also incorporating the raven motif throughout in the shields and banners—and even in the underlying structure of the house itself.

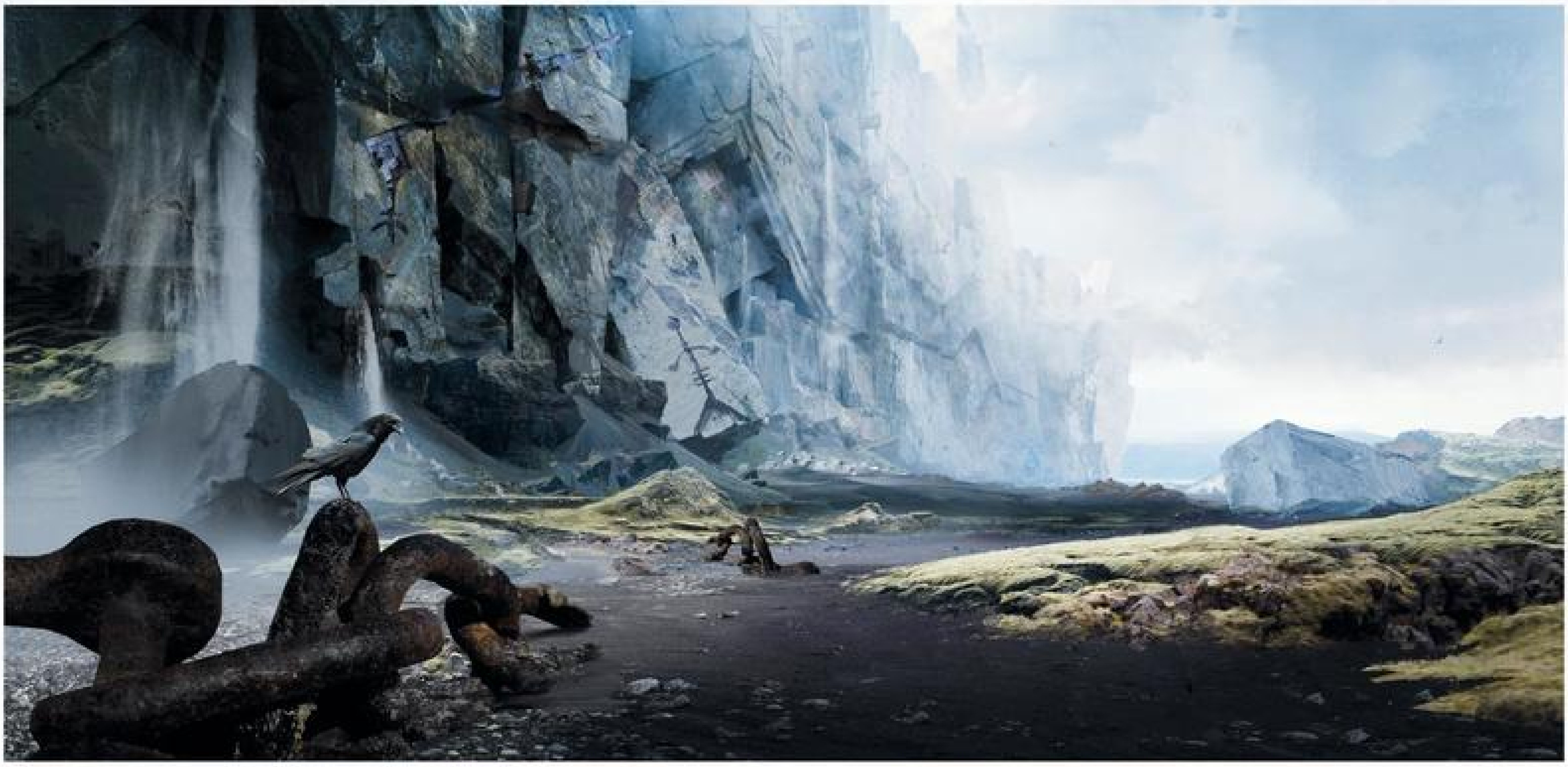
The exterior of Odin's house. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Abe Taraky (middle and bottom)

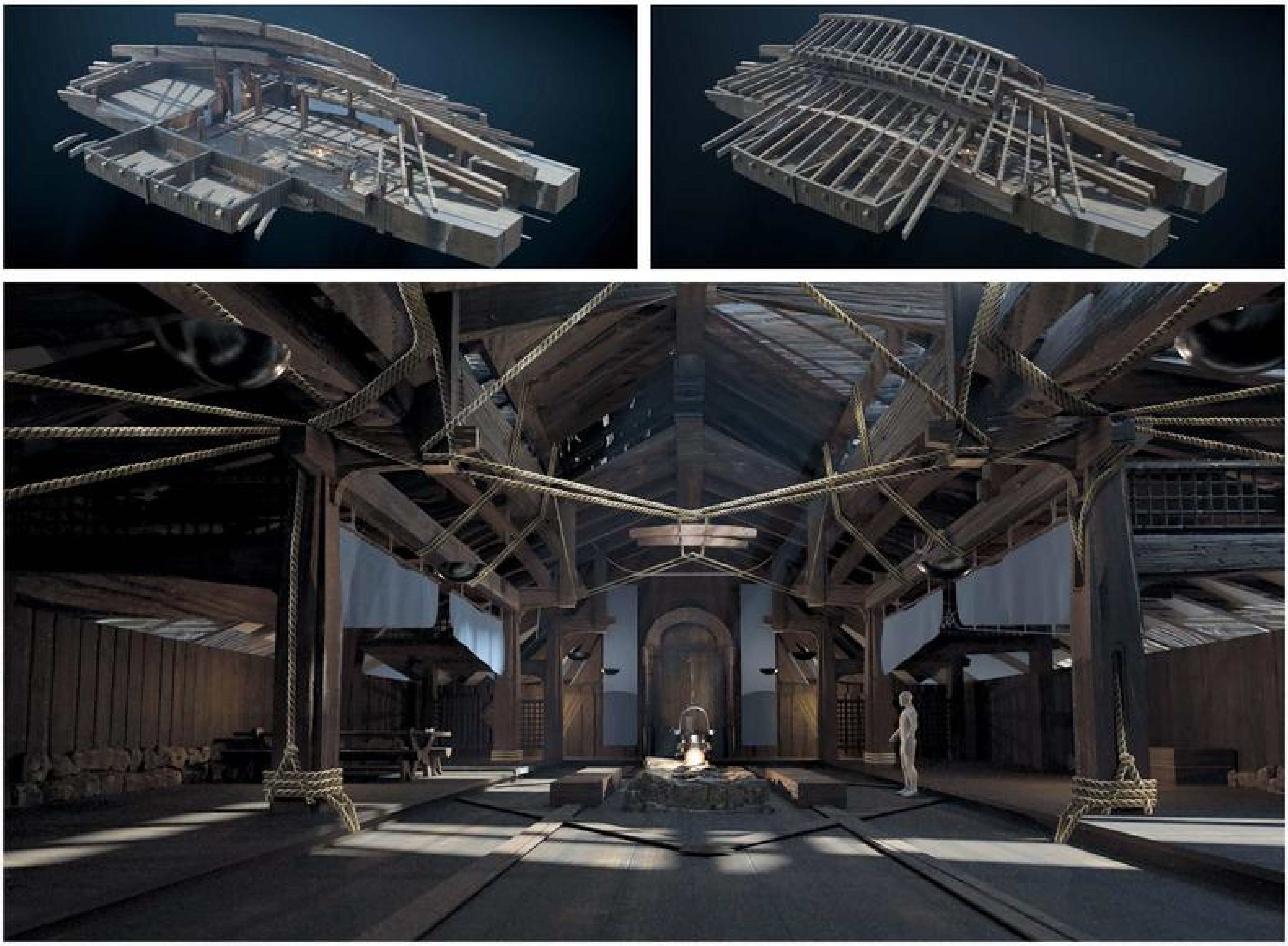






A riverbed in Asgard. Artist: Luke Berliner



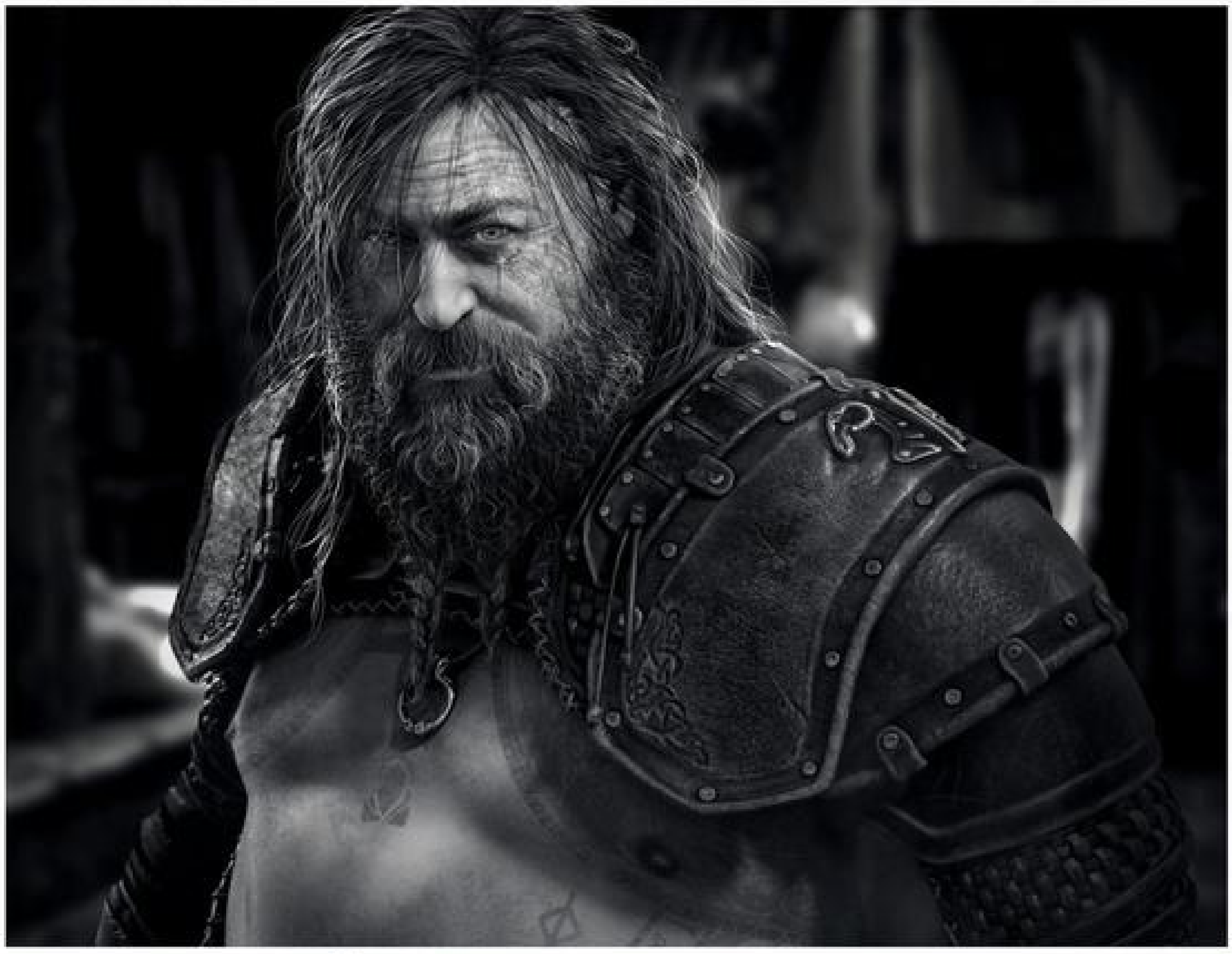


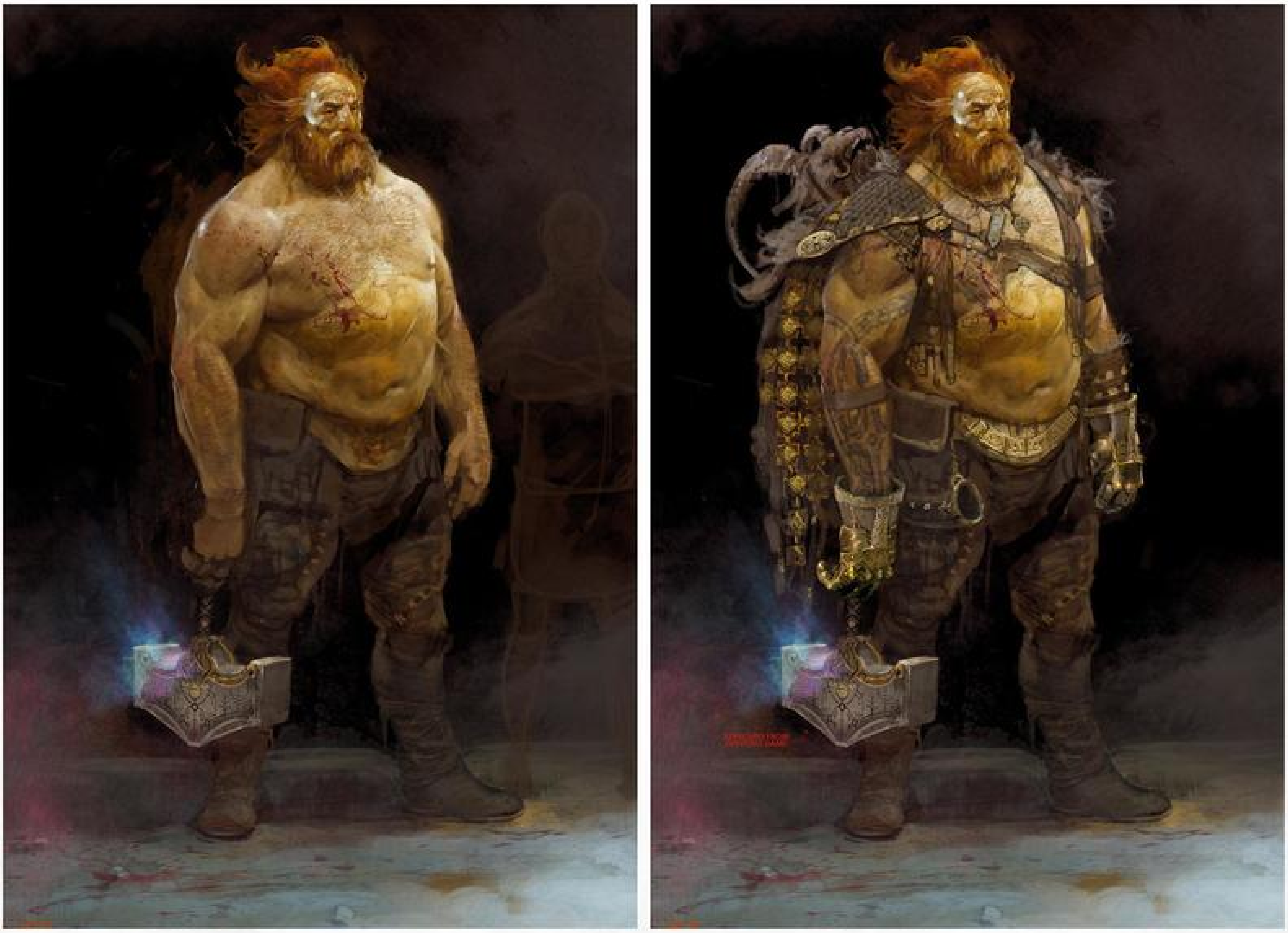
Though nothing like a gilded hall, Odin's home still has a grand footprint. This concept explores the scale of his halls with a 3D model illustrating how small a human-sized being would feel when petitioning Odin. The size of his home reinforces his stature and place as a ruler.

THOR

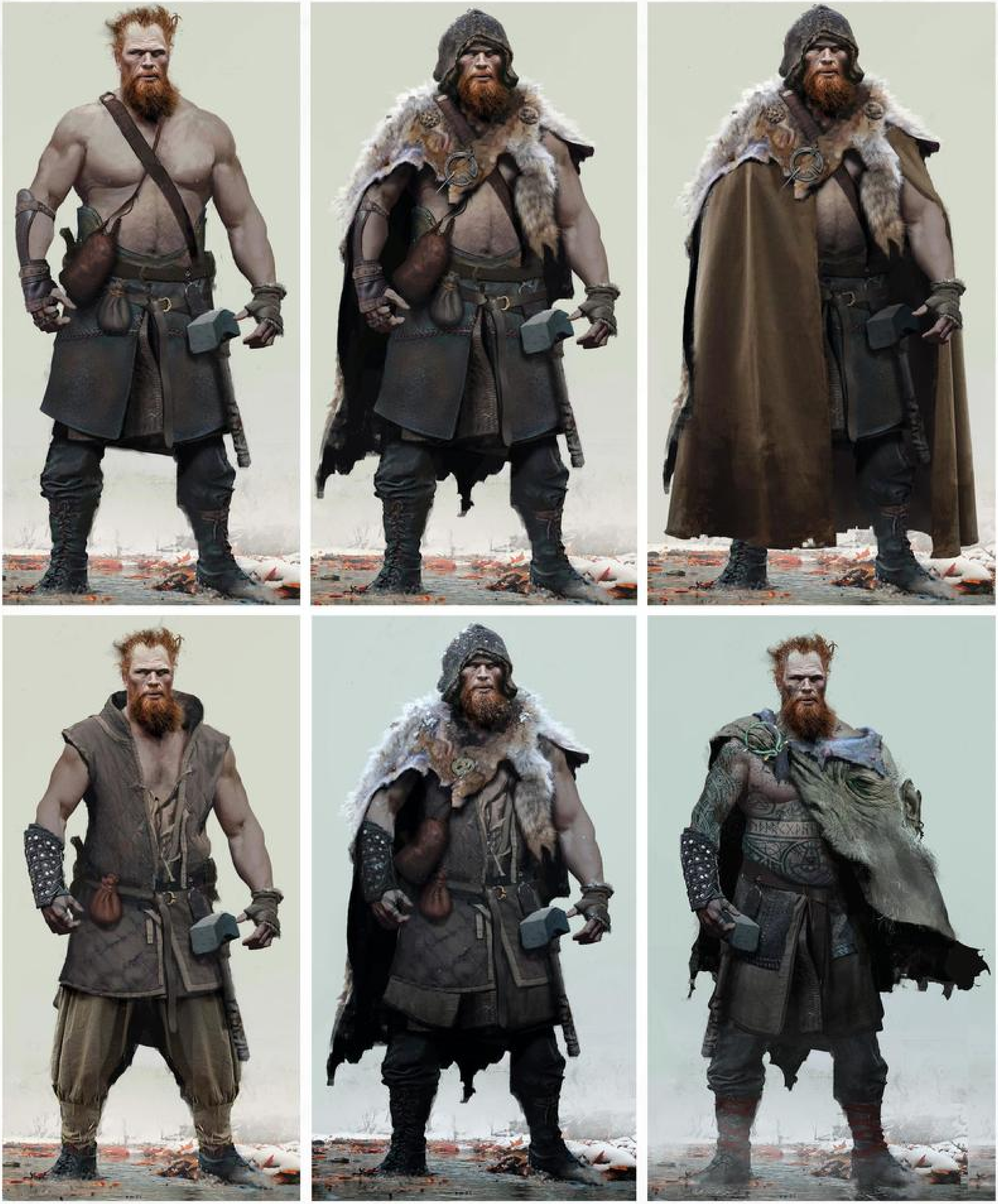
"Bringing in these well-known characters from different mythologies is always very exciting for the team," Grassetti said. "To try to find the *God of War* take, we did many different explorations, and these are just a few of the ones we did for Thor. We knew he needed to be big, and we wanted to incorporate design elements based on aspects from the myths, like his hair, the goats, and the belt—all on top of making an iconic and recognizable design. We also kept elements from his sons with Modi's colors and Magni's armor elements."

Bringing mythology to Thor. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top); Vance Kovacs (bottom)



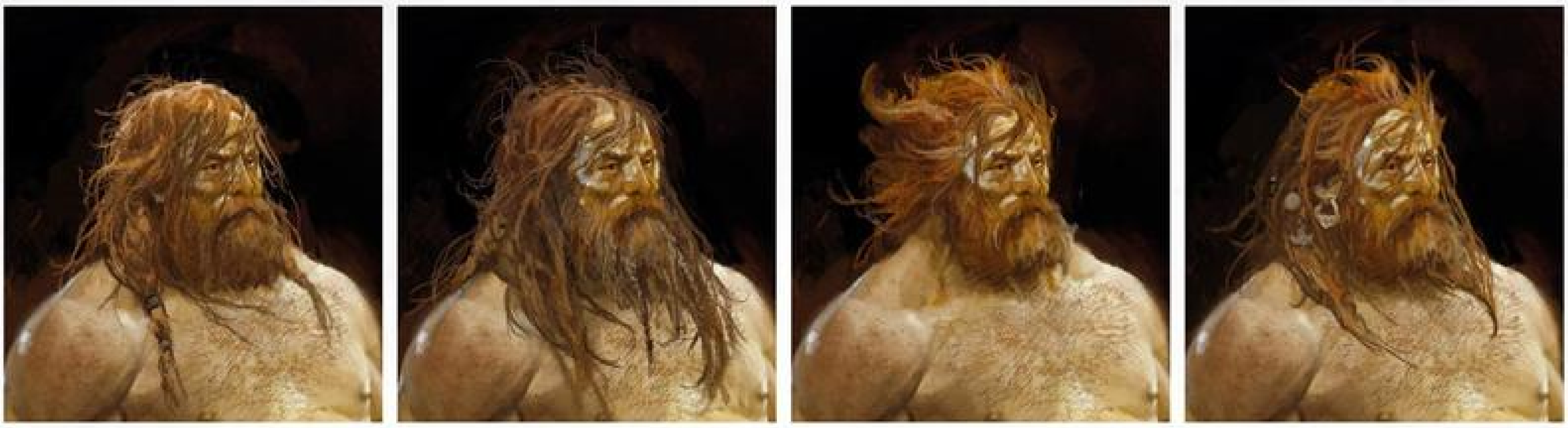


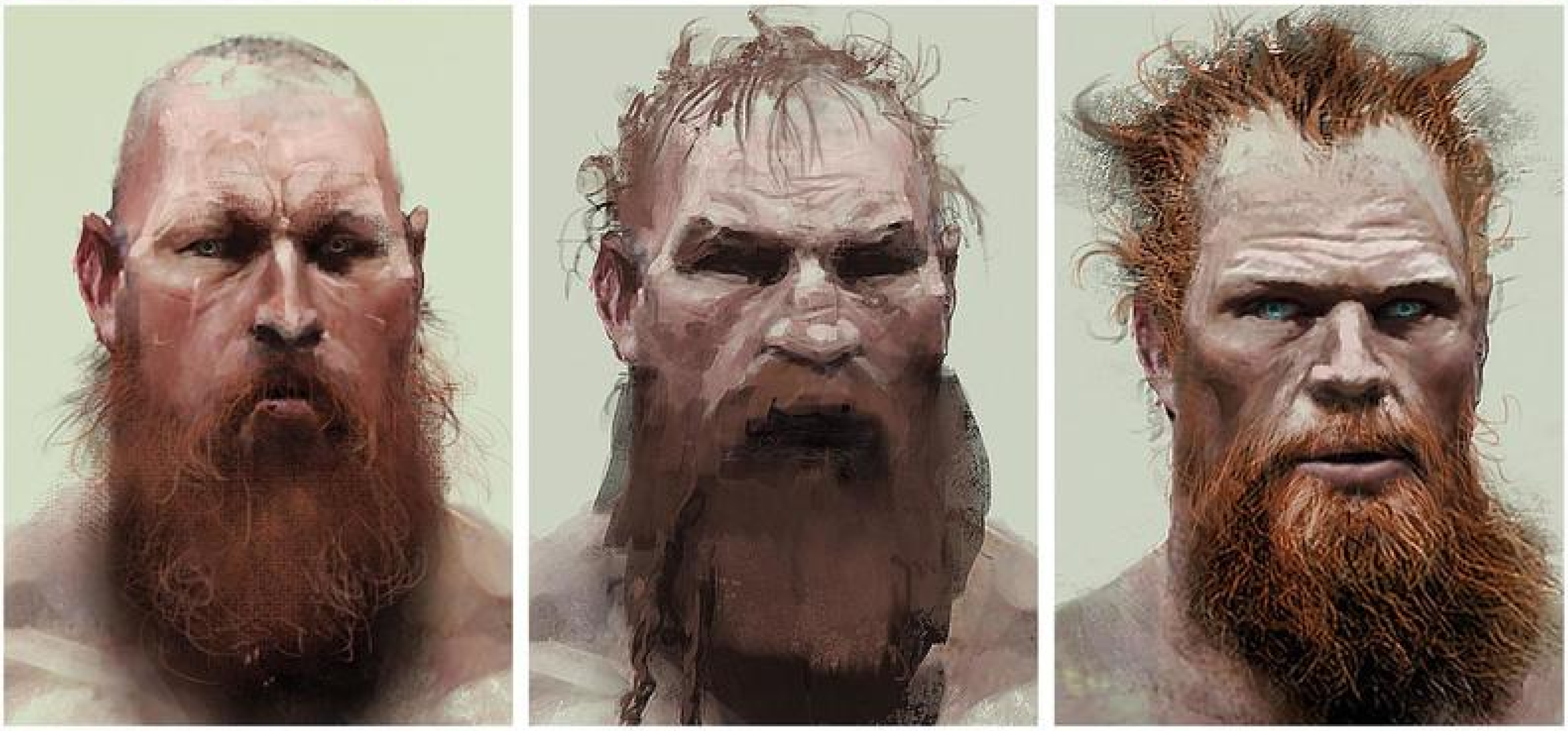
Costume concepts for Thor. Artist: José Cabrera

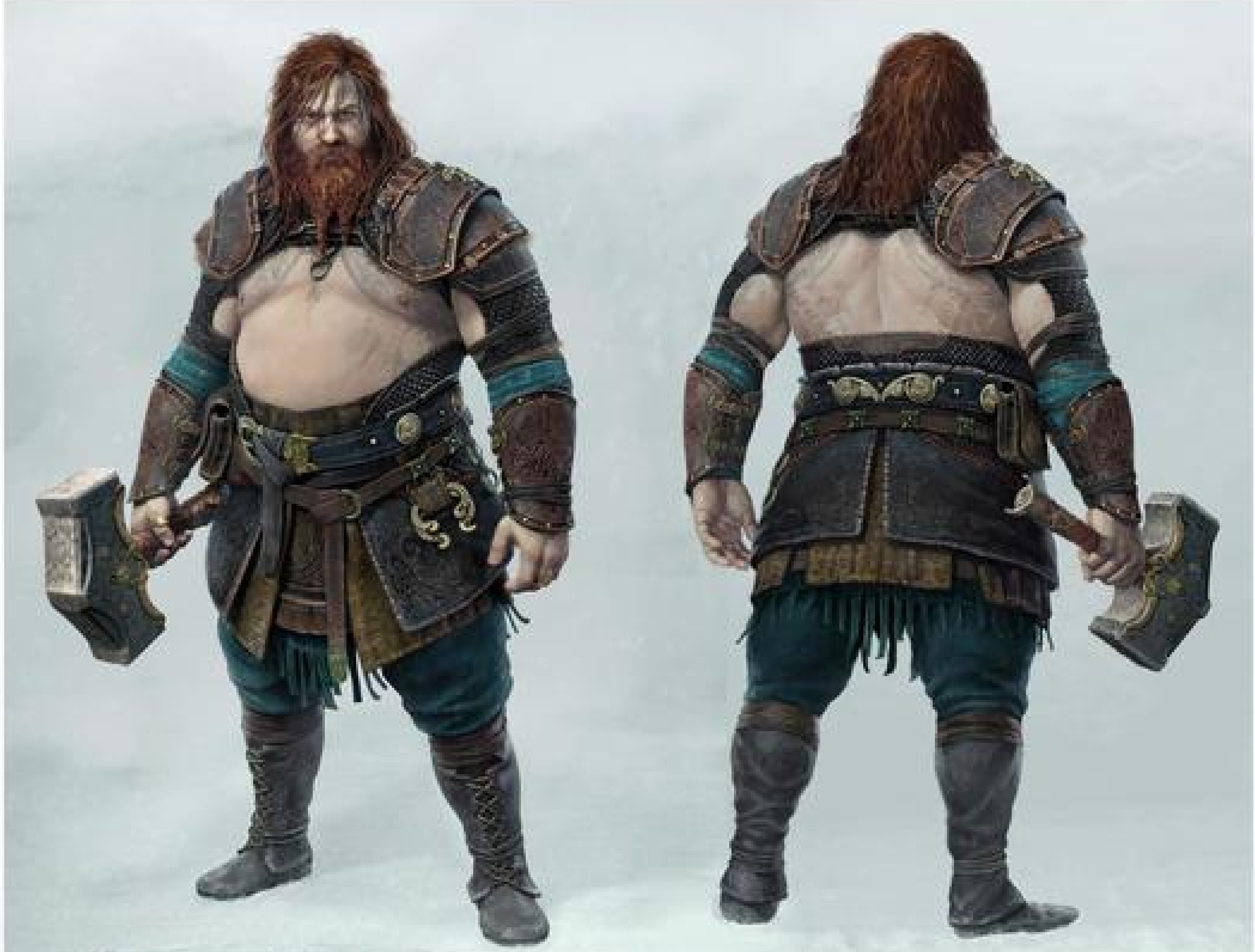


With Thor being the main icon of the Norse pantheon, the team wanted to reflect every facet of his mythology. "Early in the process we knew he should embody raw strength unbalanced by any other feature," Cabrera said. "Since he has no match in strength, we wanted him to have the build of the 'strongman' competitive athletes. We also wanted to show in his stare a distinct anger and madness mixed with a touch of loneliness."

Exploring Thor's hair and face. Artists: Vance Kovacs (top); José Cabrera (middle); Shan Qiao (bottom); Rafael Grassetti (opposite)





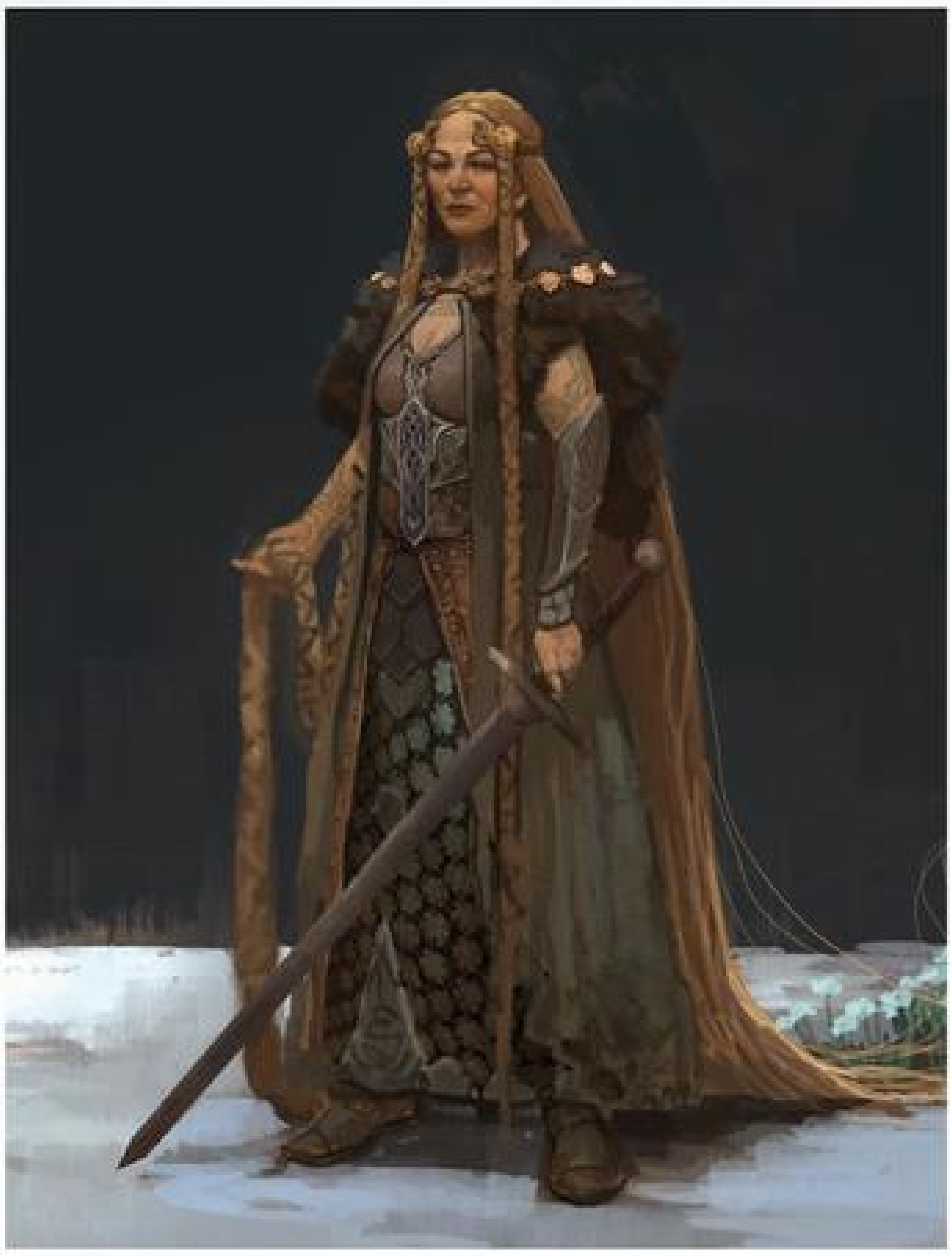


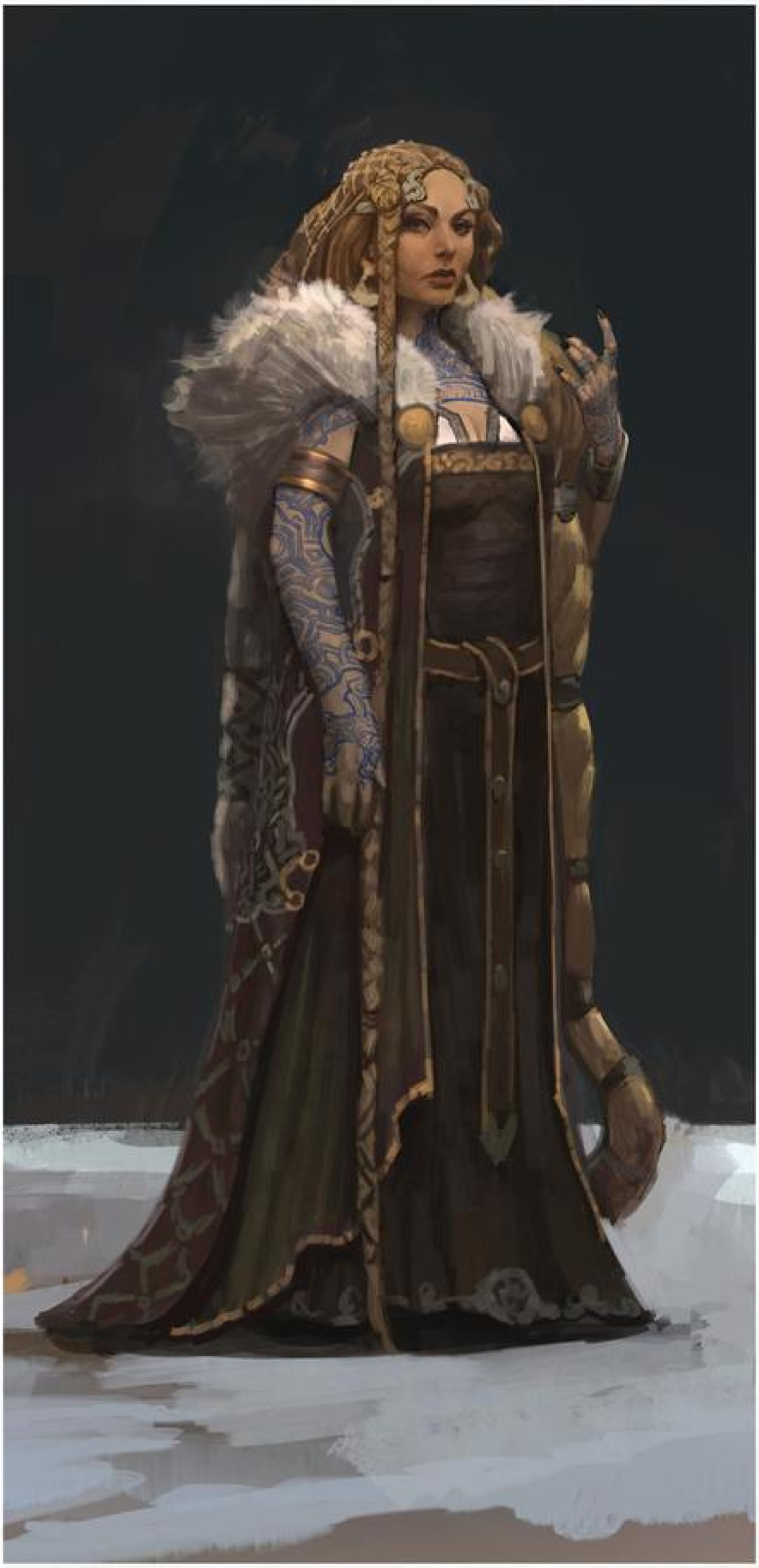
***Ragnarök* presents a Thor who is atypical of the common interpretation of the mythological character.** Here, he's more harrowed and haunted. His experiences and losses haunt his eyes. Cabrera said, "An important field of exploration was Thor's state of mind, as far as visuals can reflect. At some point we guessed that if he was apart from the gods' society, maybe he was a drunkard or a sociopath; he has the stare of wrath and blood lust.

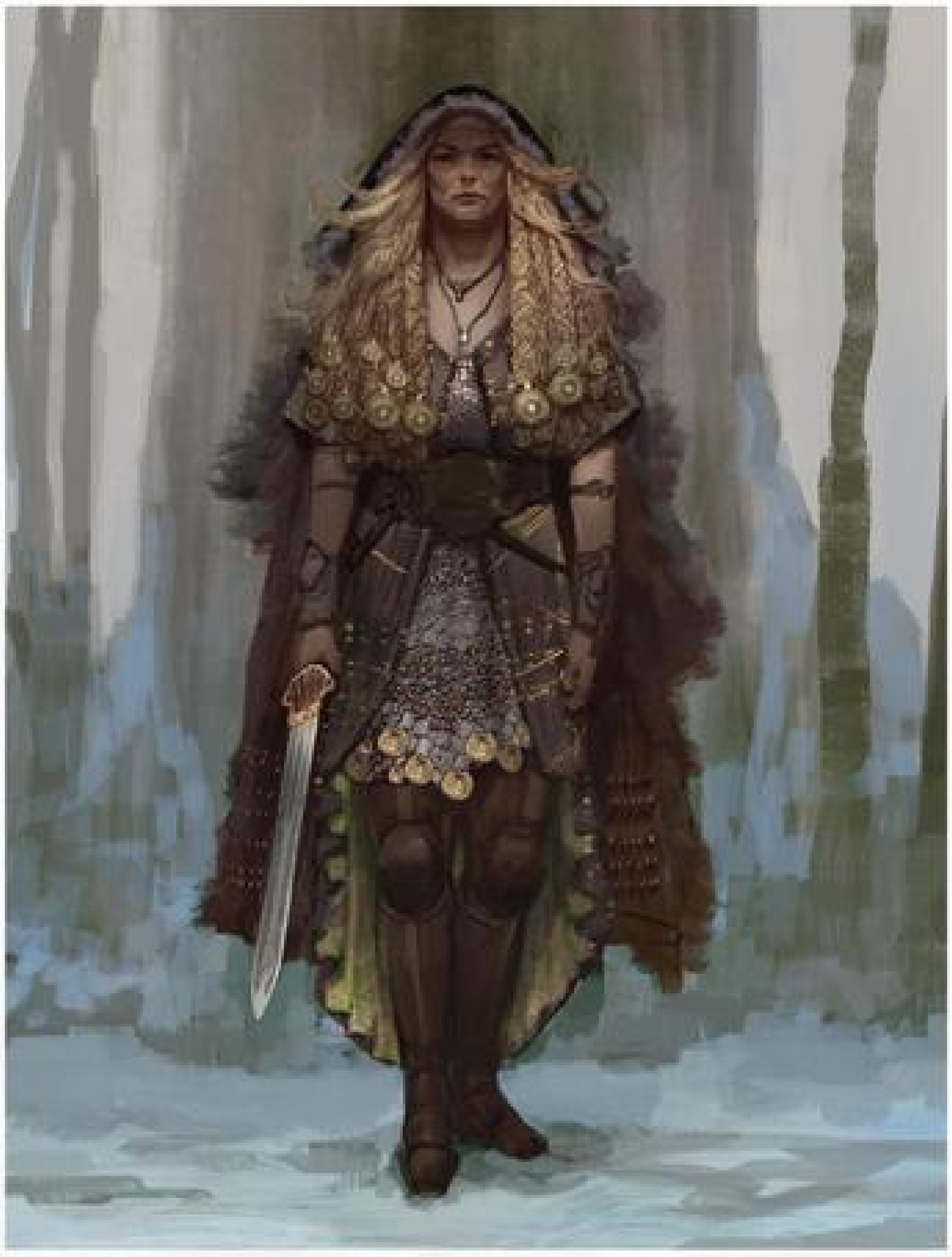
"Same thing with his physical appearance. We explored degrees of muscularity and loss of fitness. Interestingly, unlike other mythological heroes and gods, Thor is a character that allows for such divergent interpretations and a wide range of opposing visuals."

SIF

Sif is, first and foremost, a powerful goddess. That figured into her design as well as her role as Thor's wife and Thrud's mother. "In contrast to Thor, Sif's look had to capture nobility, fortitude, and a sense of calm," Longfish said. "Her golden hair is a significant part of her myth, and Vance made a beautifully bold and elegant braid of hair running down her front. These woven strands of brilliant gold hair became a predominant part of her design."



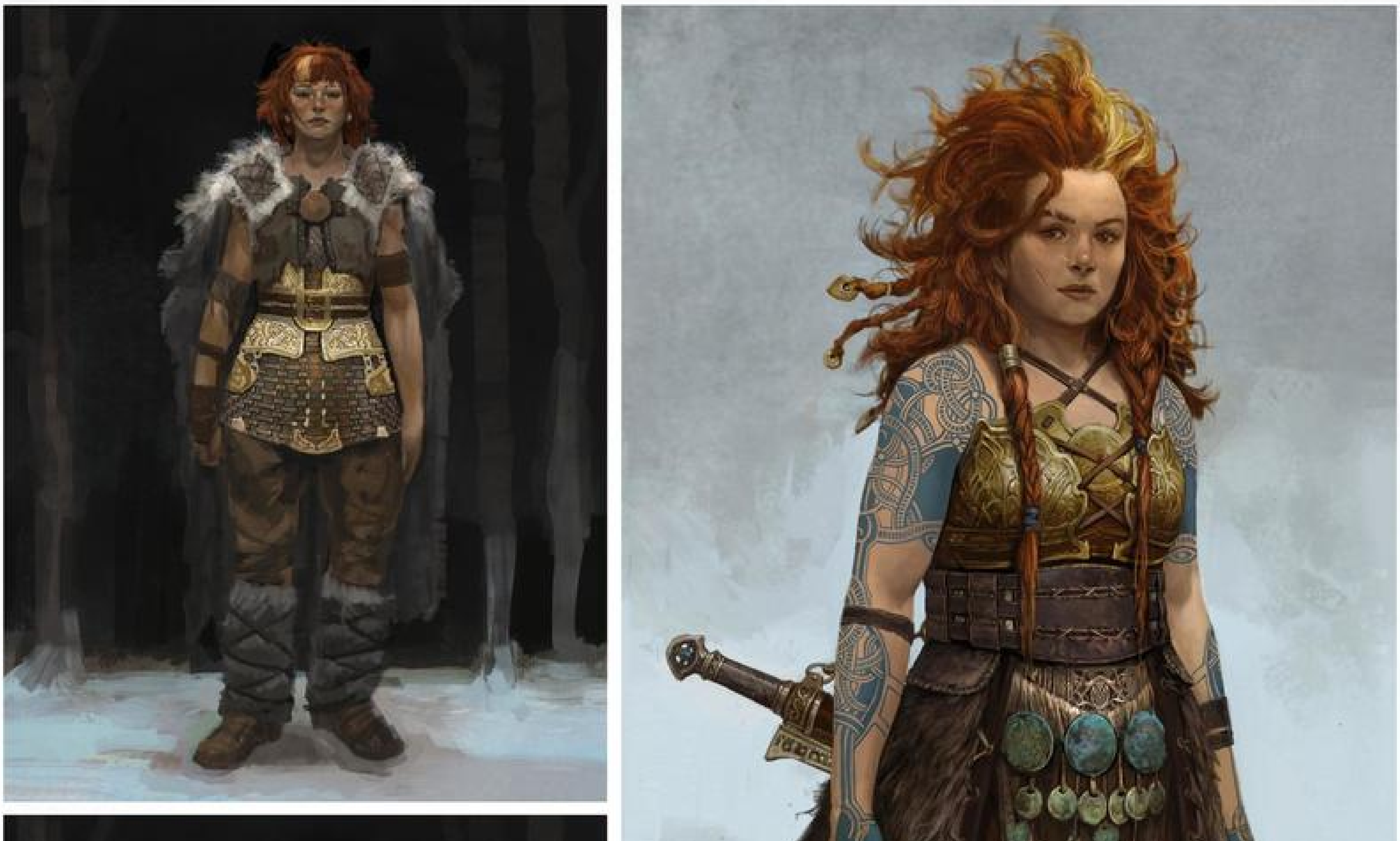




Costume concepts for Sif. Artist: Vance Kovacs

THRUD

Artist Vance Kovacs designed Thrud, Thor's daughter. They wanted Thrud to be able to stand alone as an individual character while still incorporating visual hints reminiscent of the costumes belonging to her family. Longfish said, "One could imagine her standing next to her brothers and seeing the family resemblance between all three siblings. Even her hair is a combination of both her parents; that same combination is symbolically evident in her personality as well."

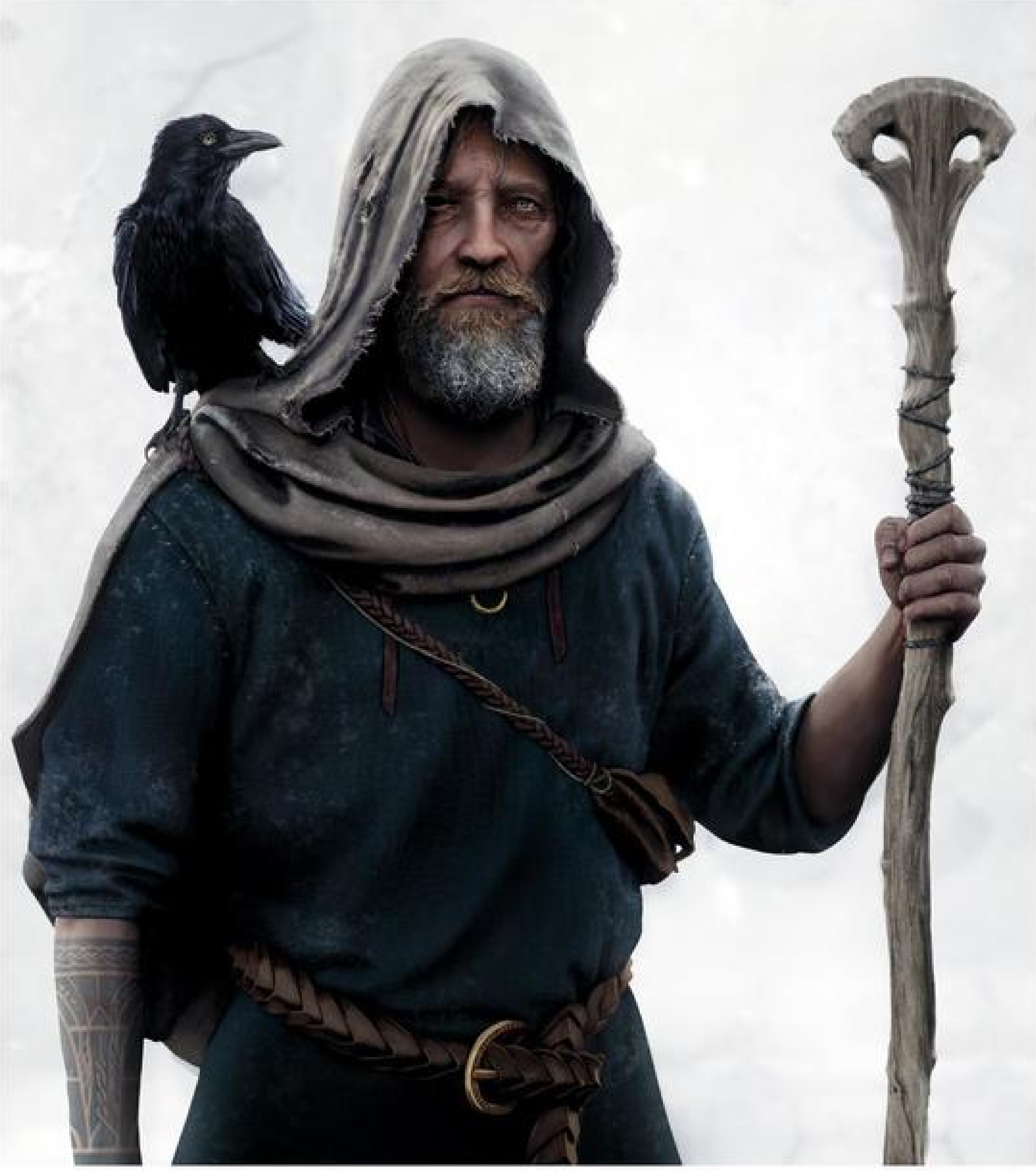


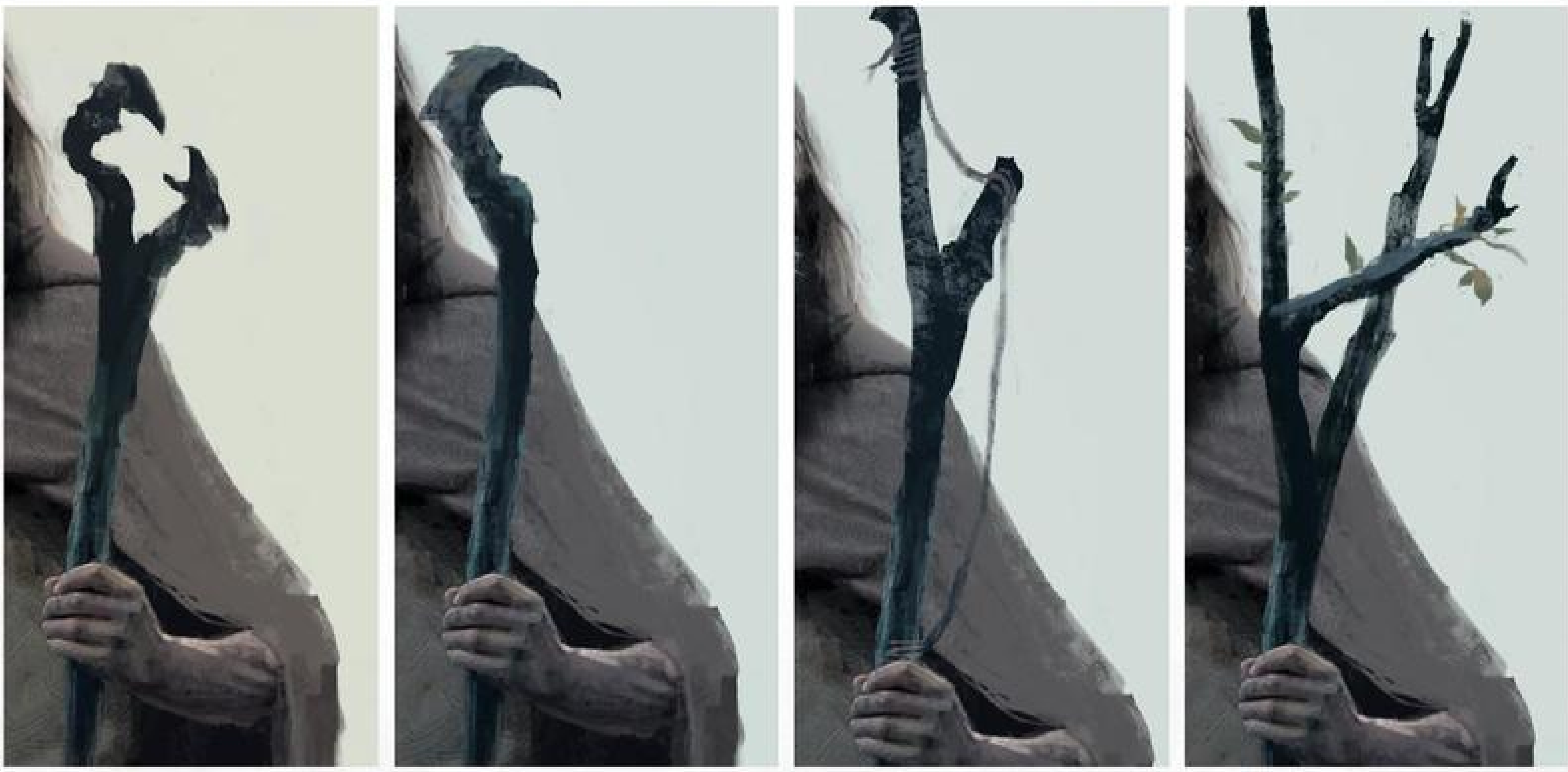
Exploring Thrud's family connections in design. Artist: Vance Kovacs

ODIN

A god of war, but also of poetry. A magician. The All-Father. Odin, ruler of the Aesir, has known many titles across the long centuries of his mythology. Despite the many tales of his exploits and relationships, Odin remains enigmatic. When the team began defining the *God of War* interpretation of Odin, they thought about the figure as a warrior. But as the character artists continued developing Odin, they delved more into the character's wisdom and magic. He's a magician with an exceptional talent for manipulation. The writers provided the artists with plenty of inspiration to play against type when it came to designing the All-Father.

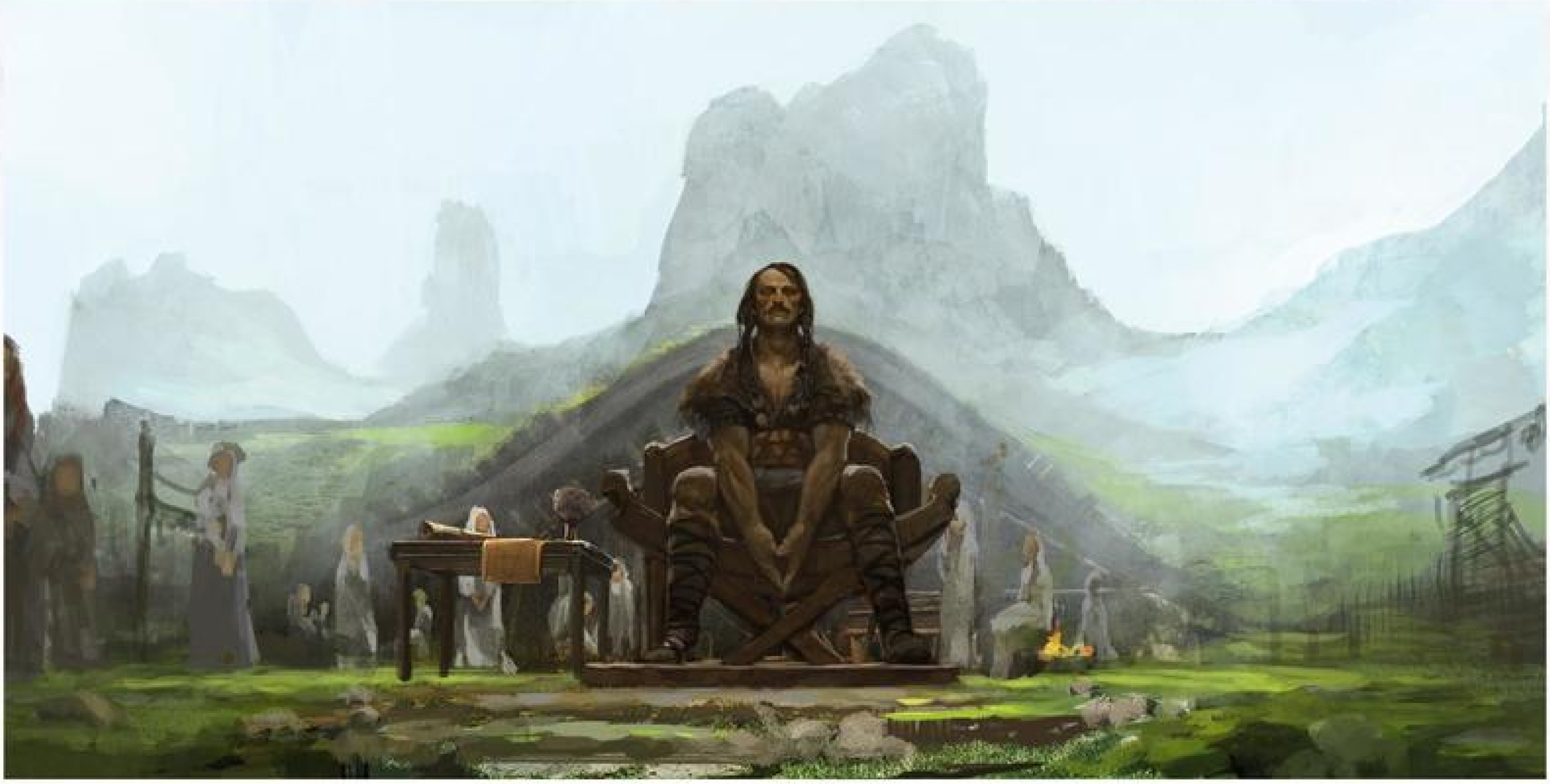
Along with all the complexities of character that they took into consideration, the team thought about Odin's age. Longfish said, "Vance did a pass on what he may have looked like in his younger days holding court in Asgard. Other middle-aged options were done—opposite we see a more wandering, nomadic look, and in contrast, a hardened general. Eventually we wanted to go with the older and wiser version of the character that complemented the direction the story was headed."

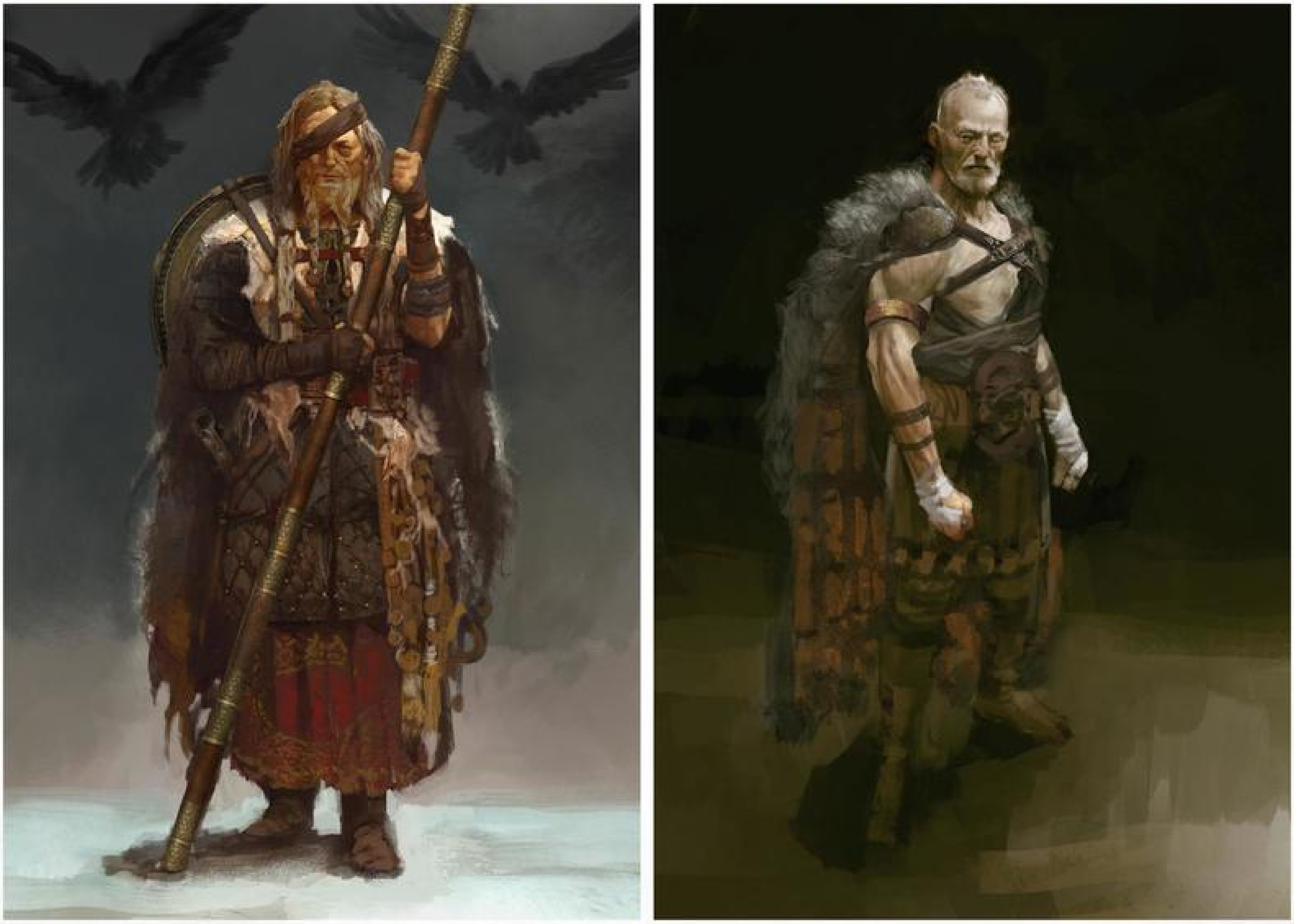




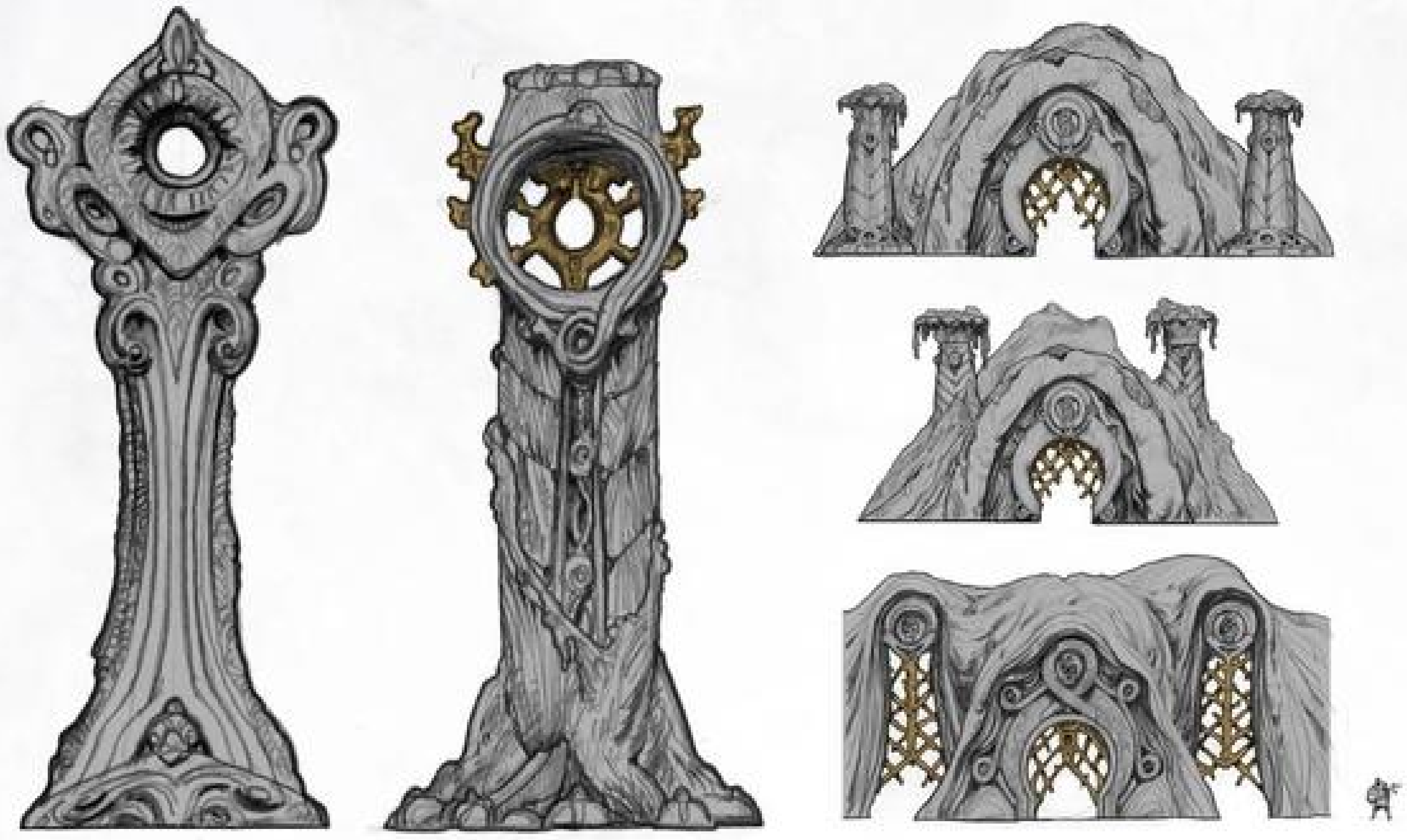
Concepts for Odin's staff. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top); José Cabrera (bottom)

Odin as a ruler. Artist: Vance Kovacs

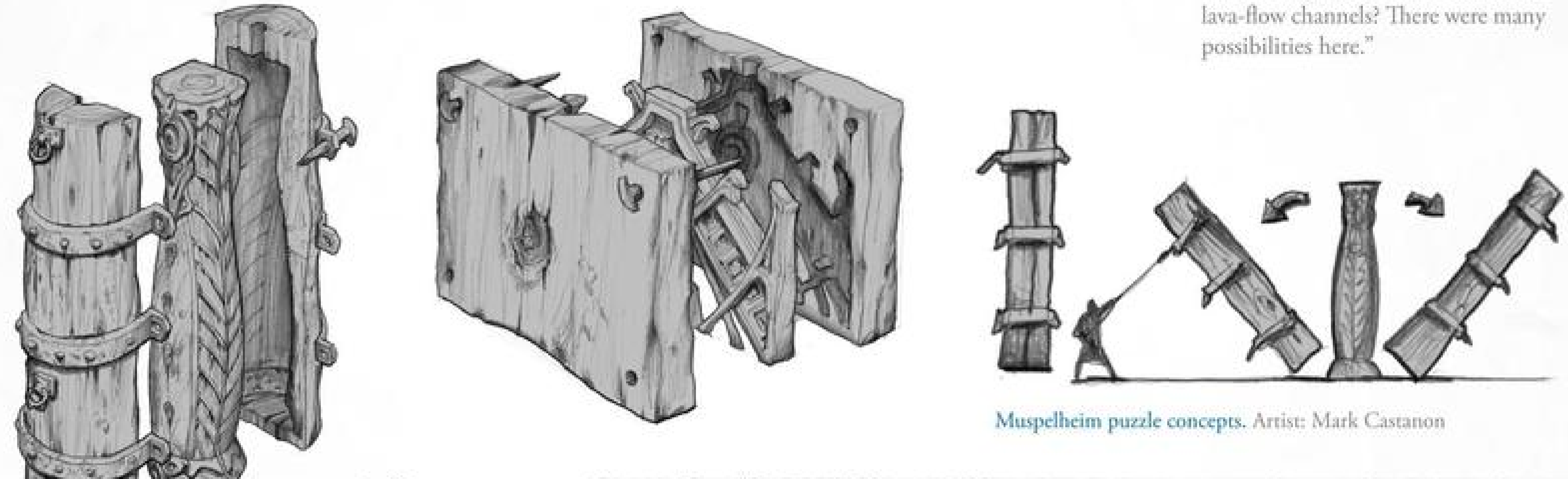




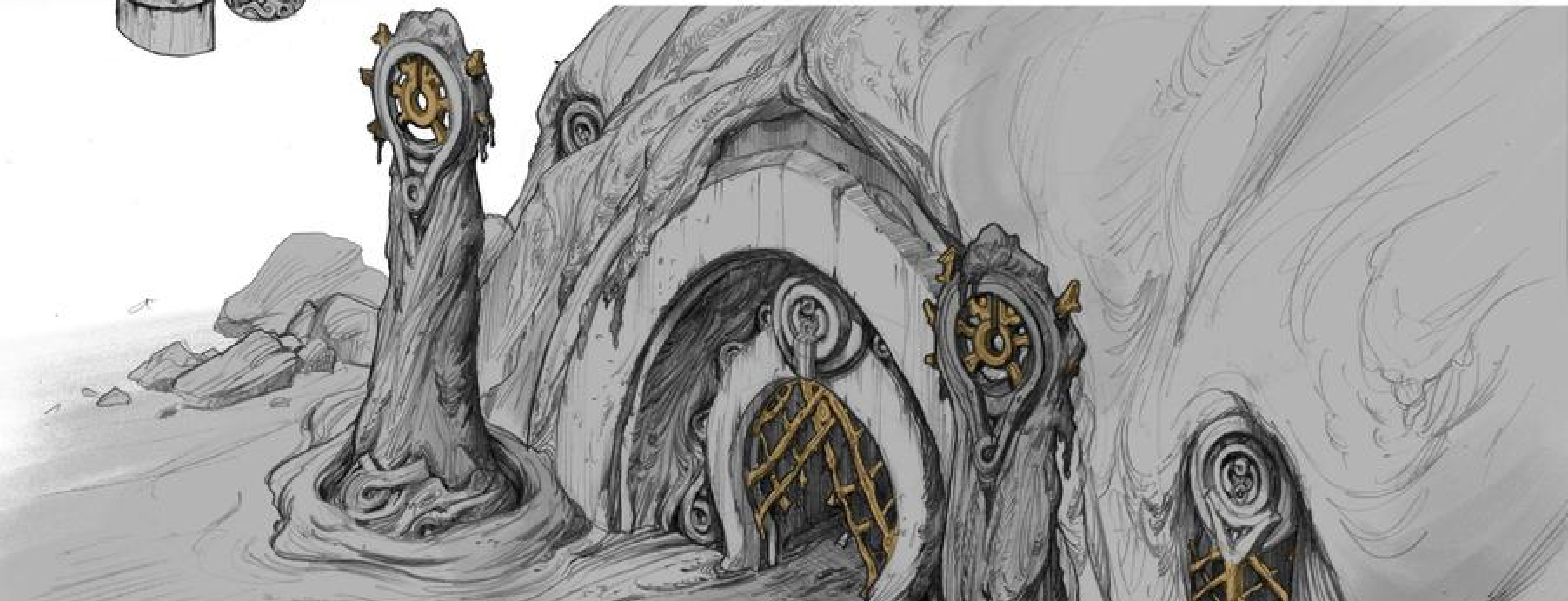
"The main direction for Odin for our game is that he was supposed to be 'unassuming,'" Grassetti noted. "We explored all ranges of designs to try to land on something that represented the father of all magic. I love the balance of detail of the costume with the simplicity of the elements. A lot can be said by the elements of his design."



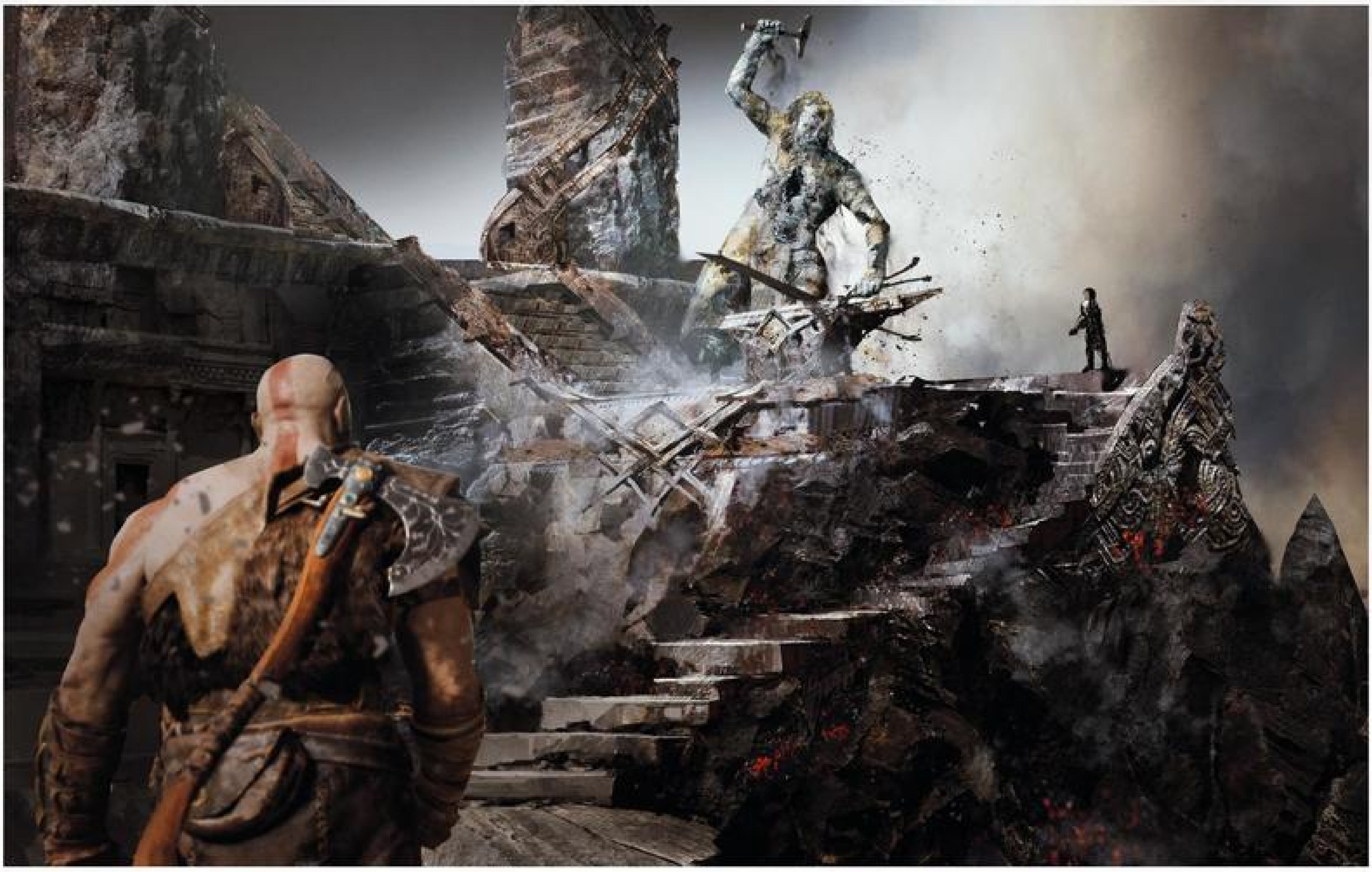
Muspelheim, the realm of fire, is represented by the molten streams of reds and oranges that carve the surrounding desolate landscapes. The artists wanted structures in the realm to emulate those textures. Castanon said, "I had numerous pages of drawings expressing a more organic lava-like, sculpted feel to the architecture. It was fun and engaging for me to think about what beings might have created these structures. Were these structures poured into giant-made molds, stamped into mountainsides with giant branding tools, or hand sculpted while they were hot? Could these beings also create controlled lava-flow channels? There were many possibilities here."

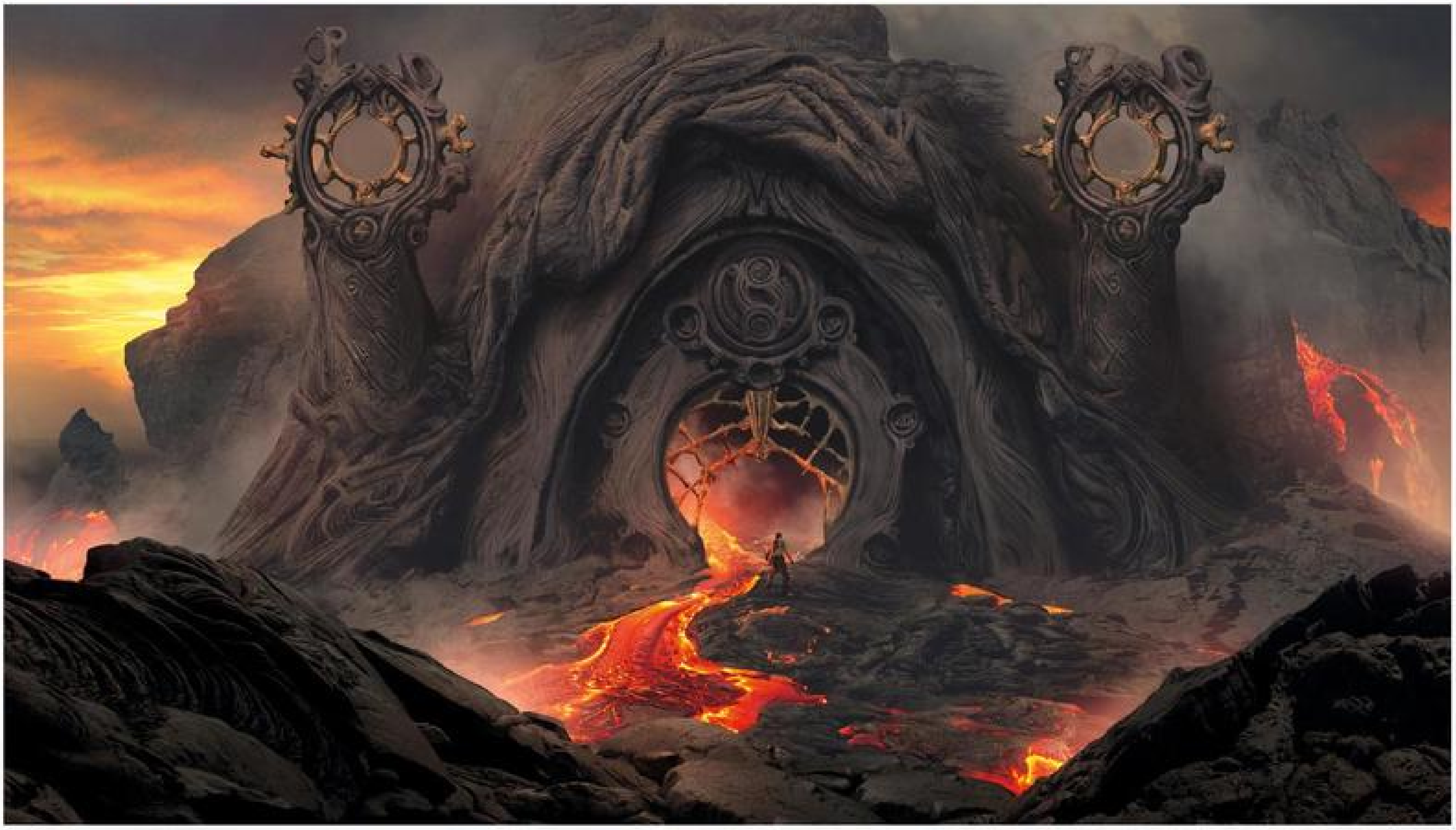


Muspelheim puzzle concepts. Artist: Mark Castanon



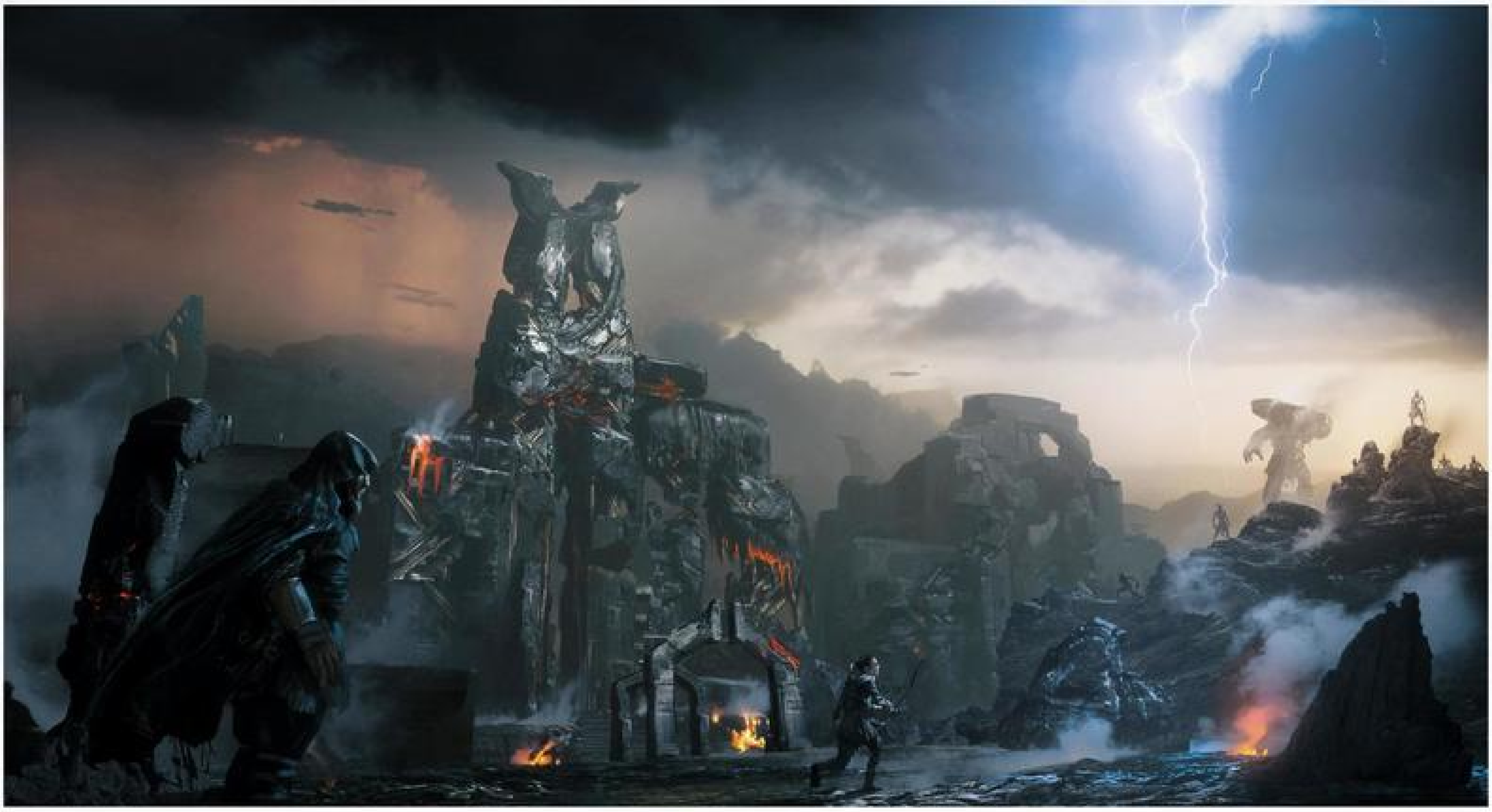
The volcanic rock landscapes of Muspelheim. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)

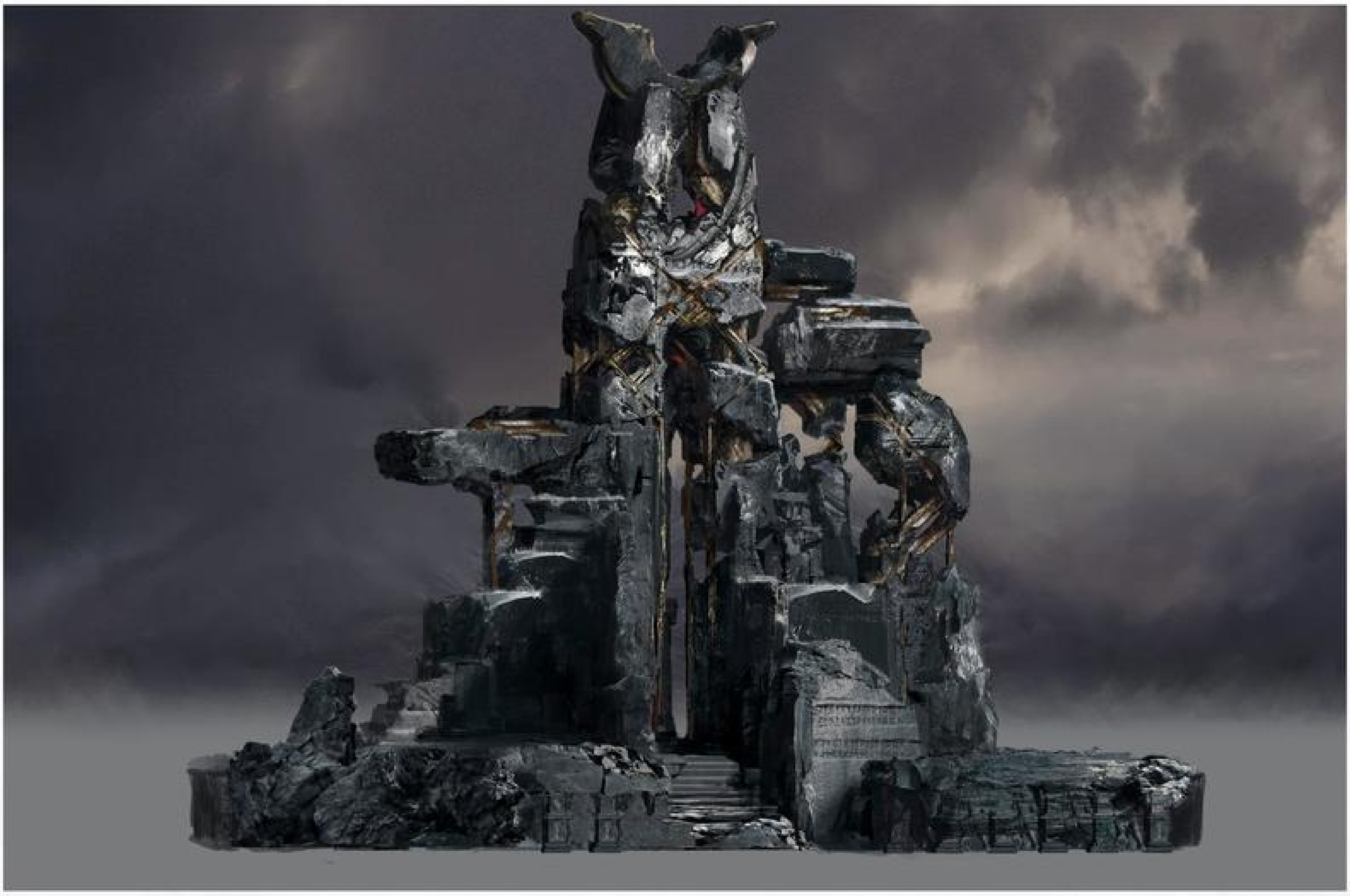




During preproduction, artists had opportunities to take designs from sketches and turn them into fully realized paintings. Castanon did that with this Muspelheim image, solving problems at all stages along the way. Whereas he thought about architecture and gameplay when he did the drawings, the painting granted the chance to add to those aspects with lighting and mood.

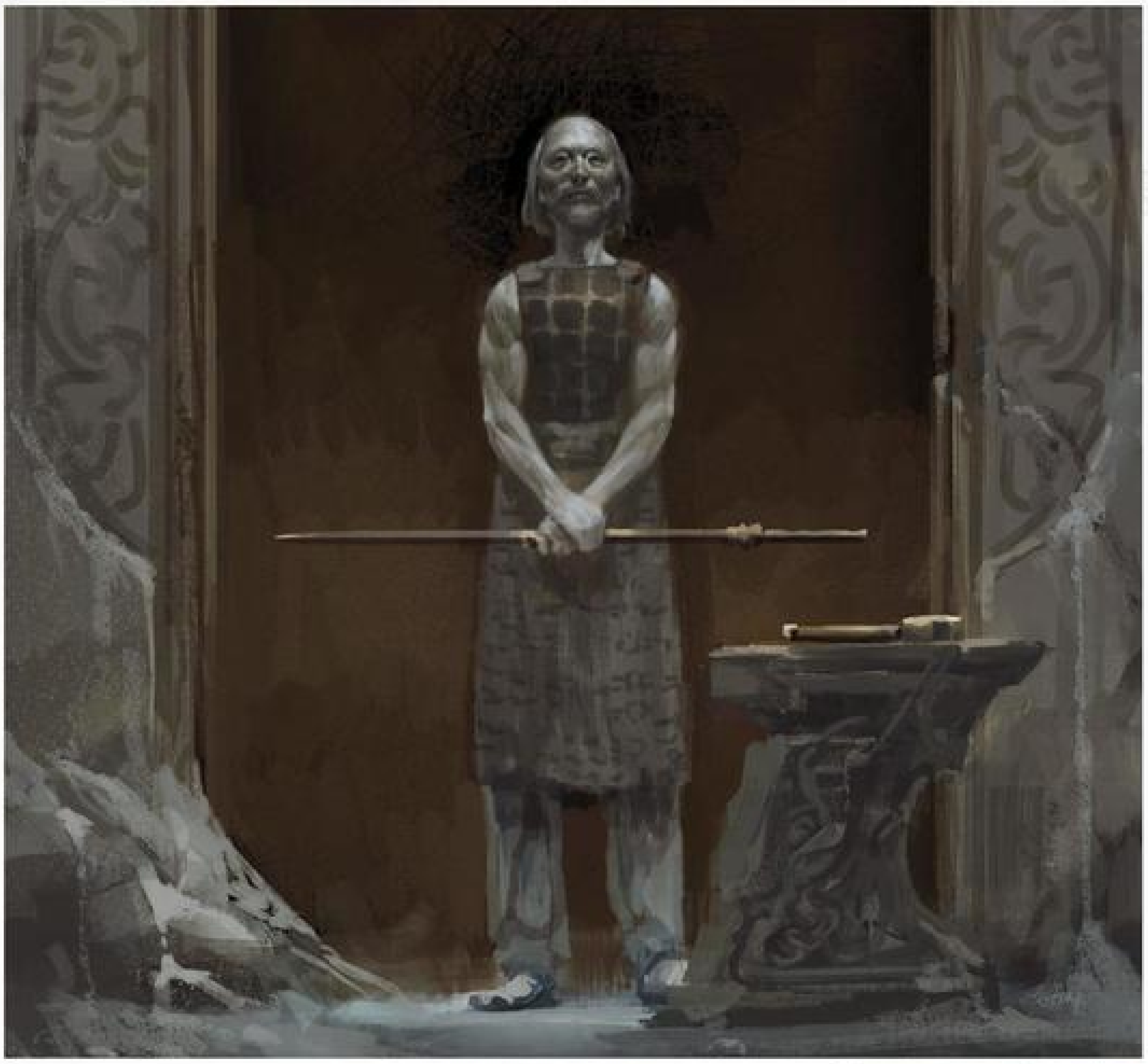
Surtr's forge. Artist: Annis Naeem





Details around Surtr's forge foreshadow the sword that Ragnarök would use to destroy Asgard. The team had an idea that Surtr would endlessly forge swords as he bided his time awaiting his inevitable fate. The surfaces of these forge concepts reflect Muspelheim's black volcanic ground, almost as if it's been carved into the surrounding obsidian landscape.

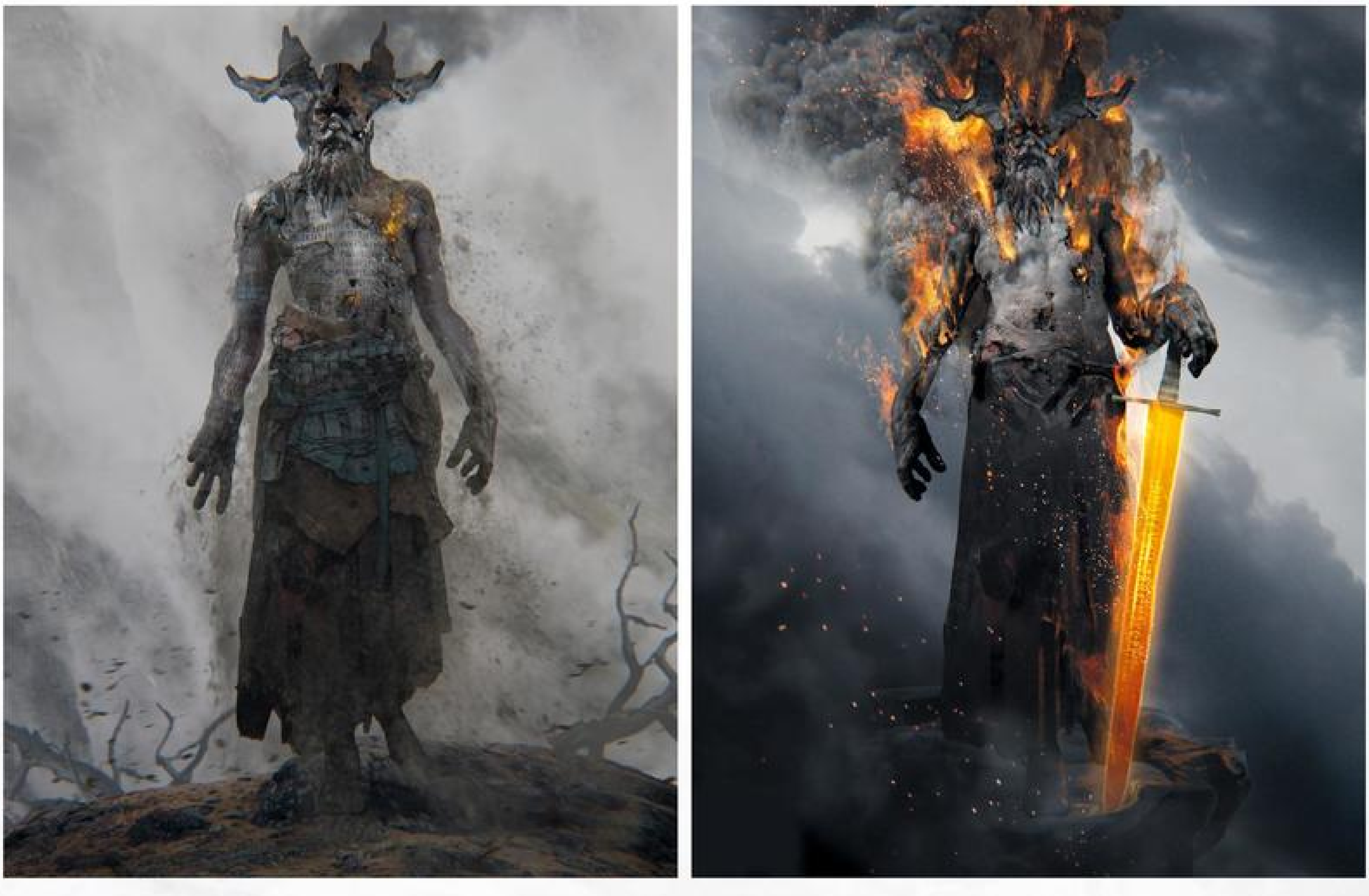
Surtr at his forge. Artists: Vance Kovacs (top); Karl Lindberg (bottom)



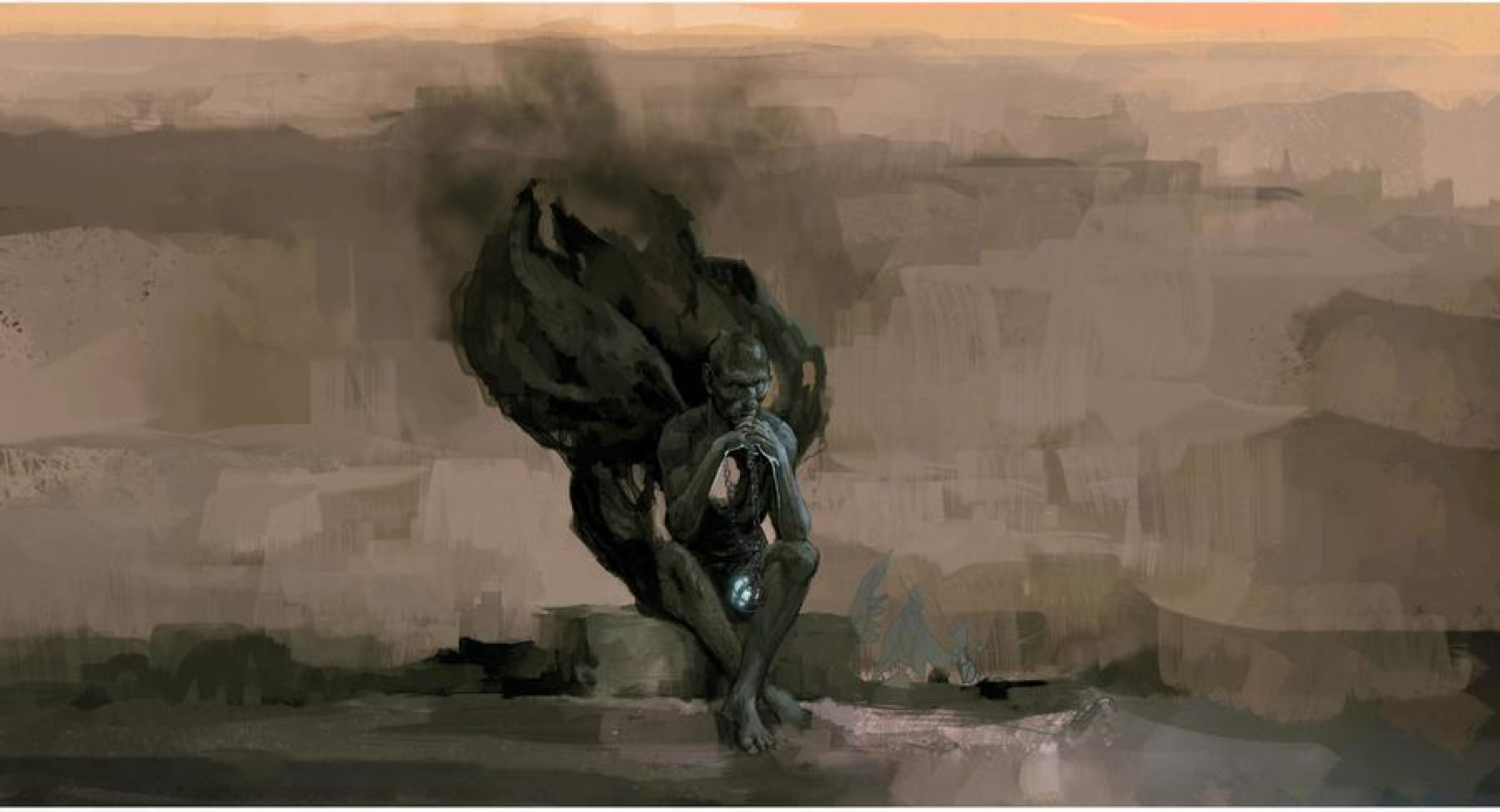
SURTR

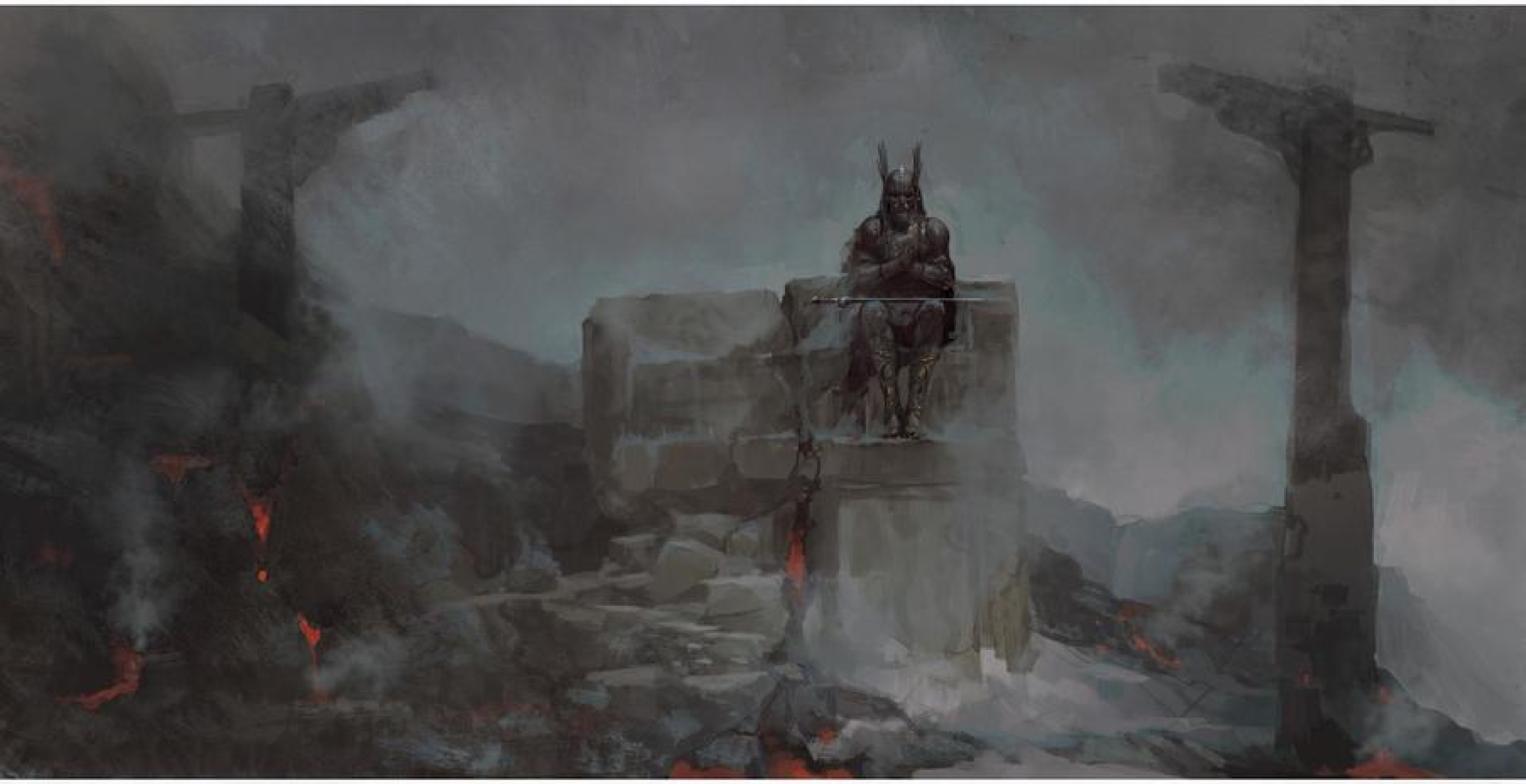
A hollowed-out carcass in early sketches, Surtr transformed as the character artists continued to seek the apocalyptic destroyer within the giant. Scandinavian myths do reference Surtr as one of two supreme evils, after all. Wielder of an awe-inspiring massive flame-sword, Surtr has a destiny that puts him at the heart of the end of the world. He's a natural force of spewing flames and massive destruction. The team had to find a balance between that raw energy and his motivation.

Oakley said, "As this was the entity who would turn into Ragnarök—and ultimately be the end of everything in the nine realms—we wanted to bridge the gap between the shell and the destroyer. We played into him as a mighty blacksmith and borrowed costuming elements from smithies and the more regal Norse. We were getting him closer and closer to his Ragnarök form, creating a more imposing, warrior-like figure."

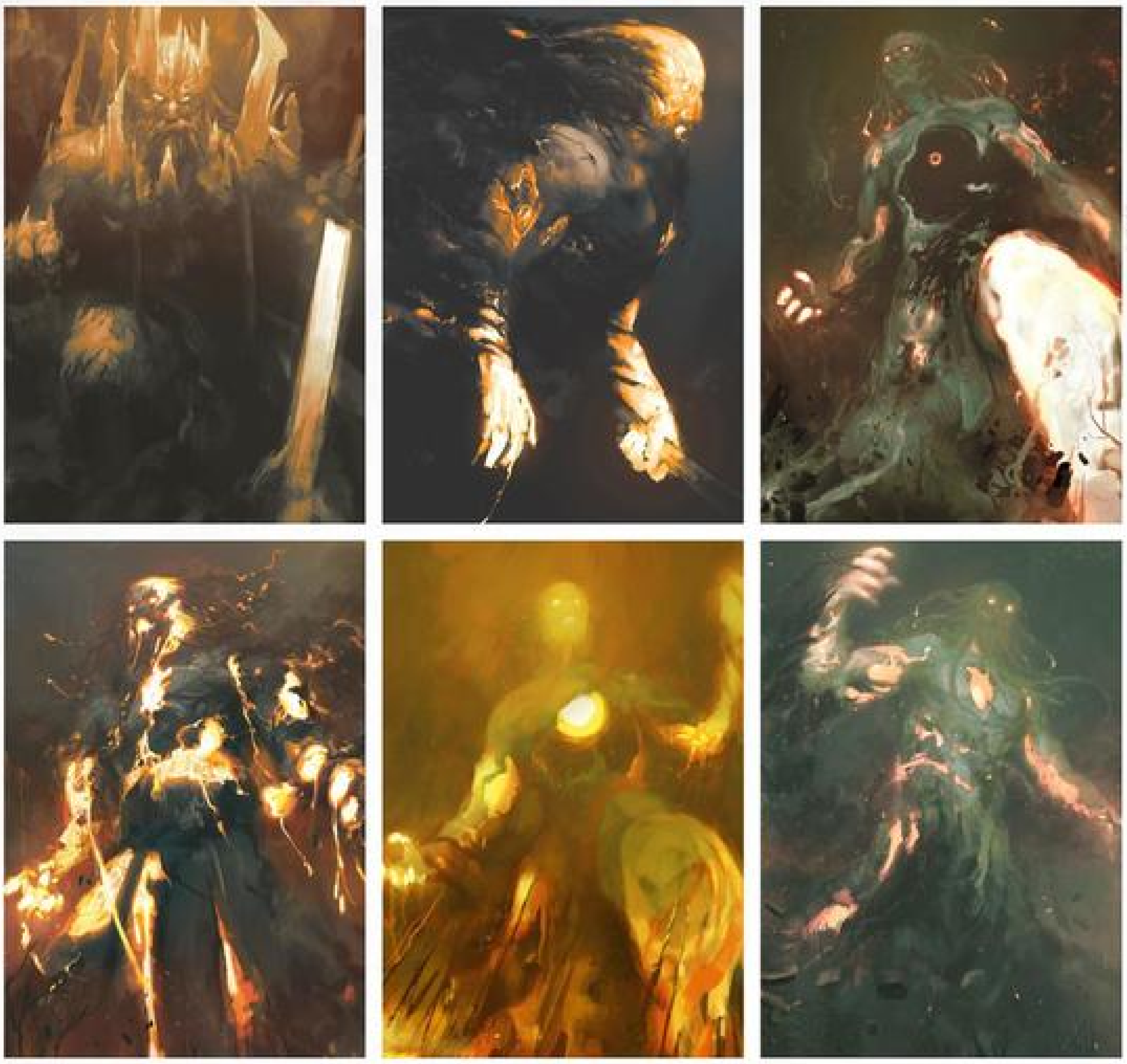


Concepts of a lonely ruler. Artist: Vance Kovacs



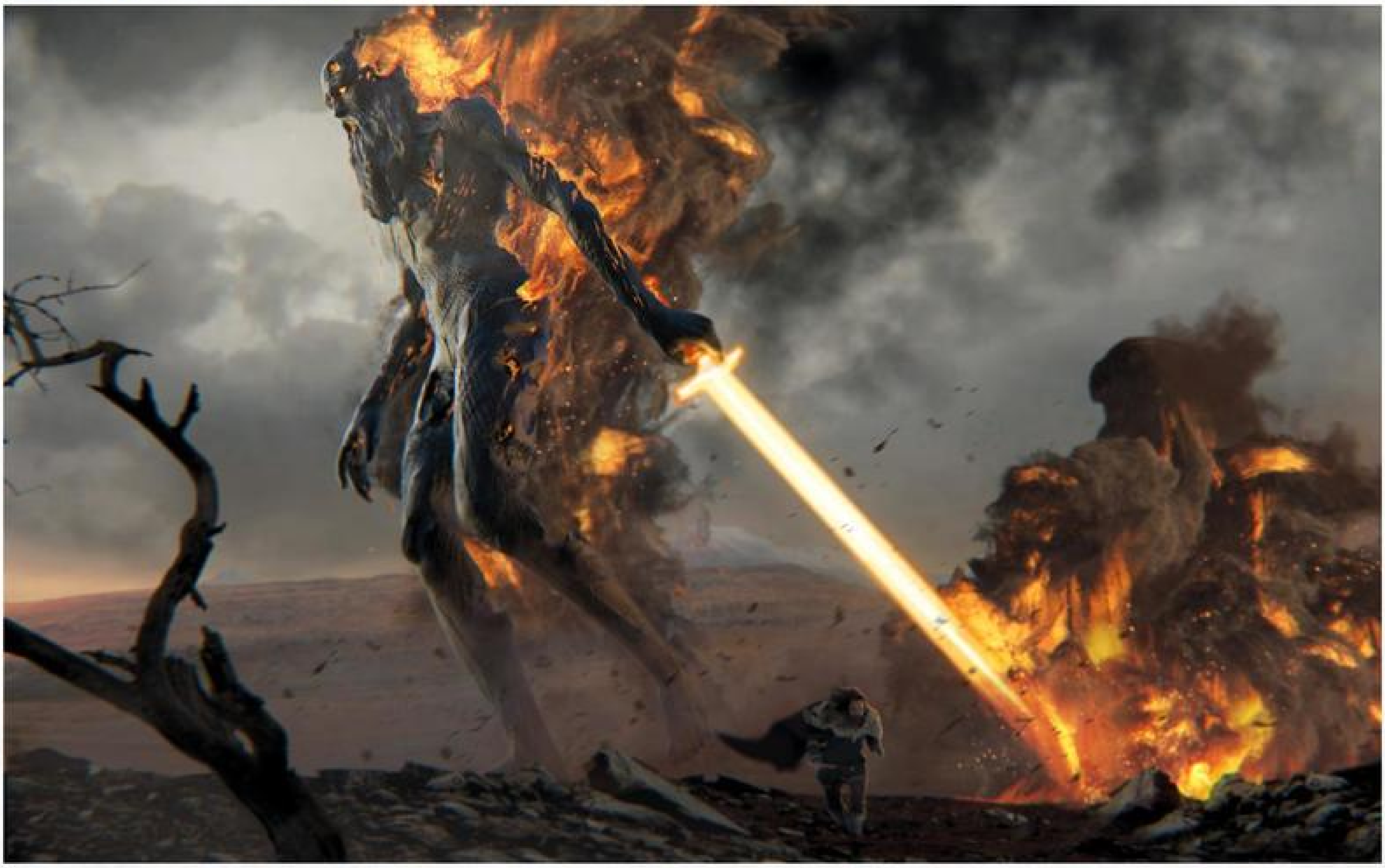


The smoldering environment of Muspelheim echoed Surtr's design throughout his creation process. Smudged ash and smoke were as much a part of the character as the realm's fiery pits. The bleak vistas of Muspelheim underscored the longing and loneliness inherent to Surtr's role in the events to come, lending more weight to the idea of Surtr being a despondent husk.



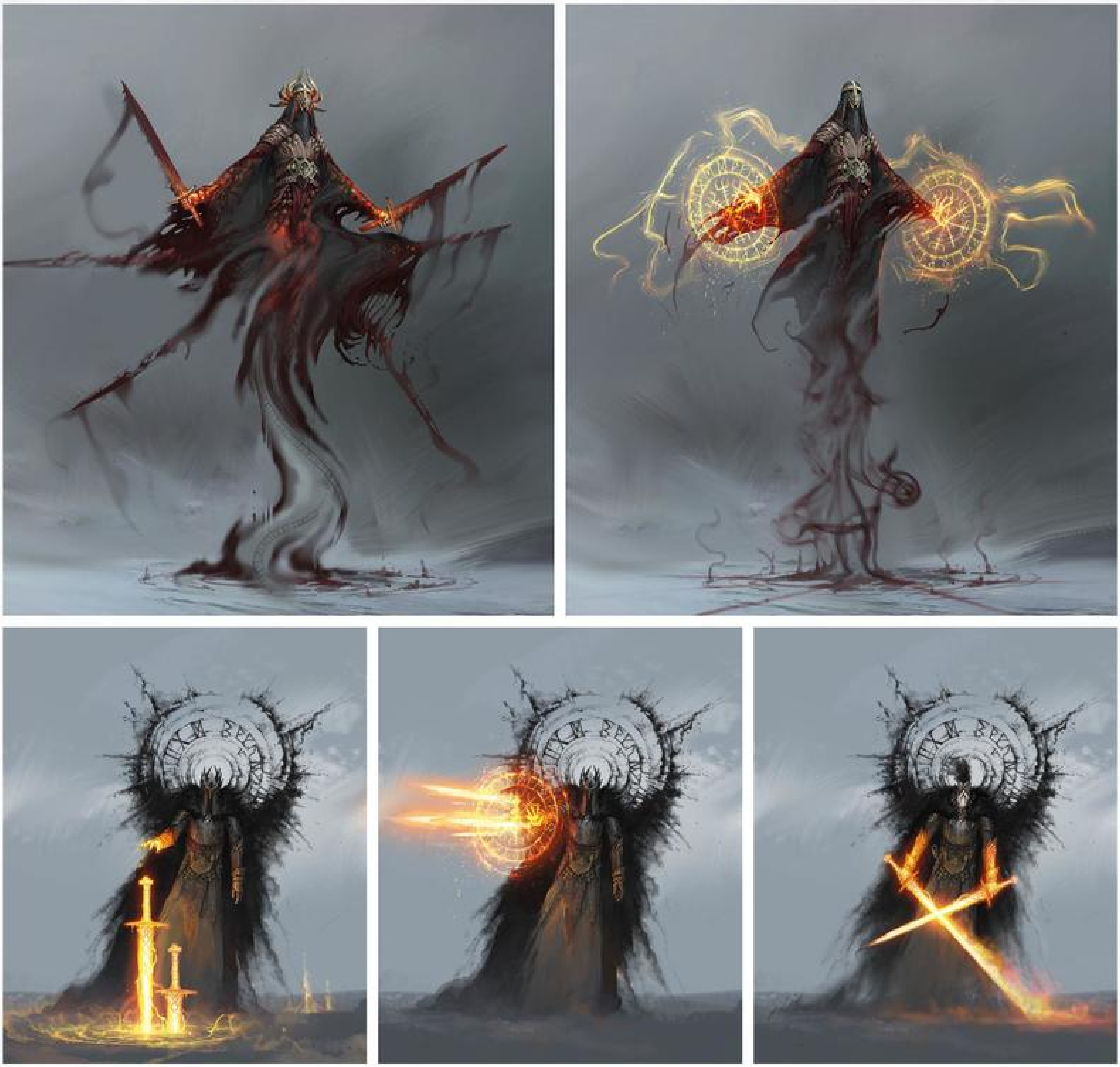
With Surtr's eventual transformation looming, the artists realized they had to make adjustments to Surtr's existing look in order to make that transformation impactful. This back-and-forth was part of the process. Designs incorporated environmental aspects of Muspelheim with hardened lava and billowing smoke to form a more fluid Surtr—all implying a massive amount of chaos within.

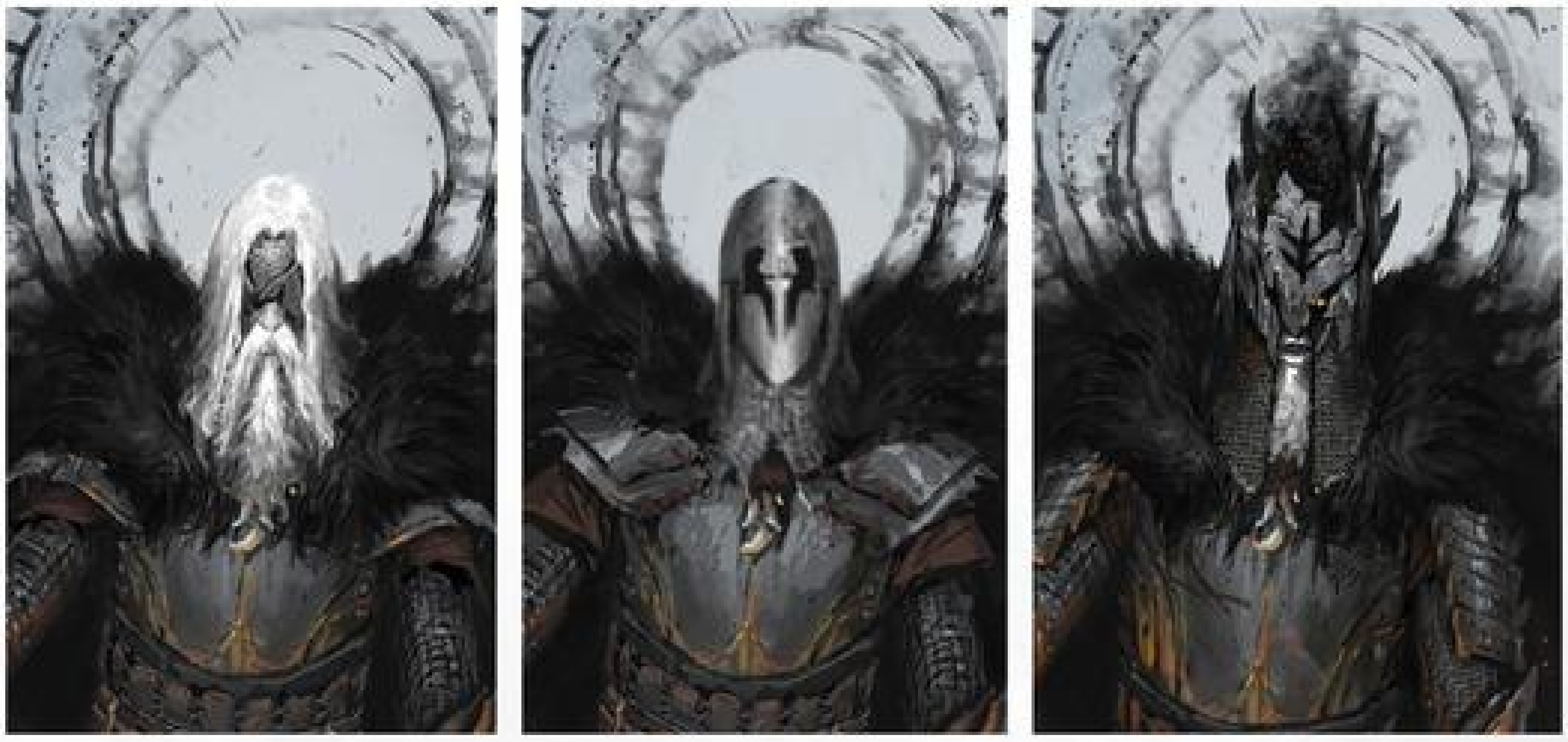
"We pulled back a bit more on his armor and epic elements, reserving those details for Ragnarök," Oakley said. "As Ragnarök was being finalized into less of an expected gigantic warrior and more of a primordial being, we began to tweak Surtr. We landed on a sullen and foreboding entity that balanced all the elements of his realm, his purpose, and his personality."



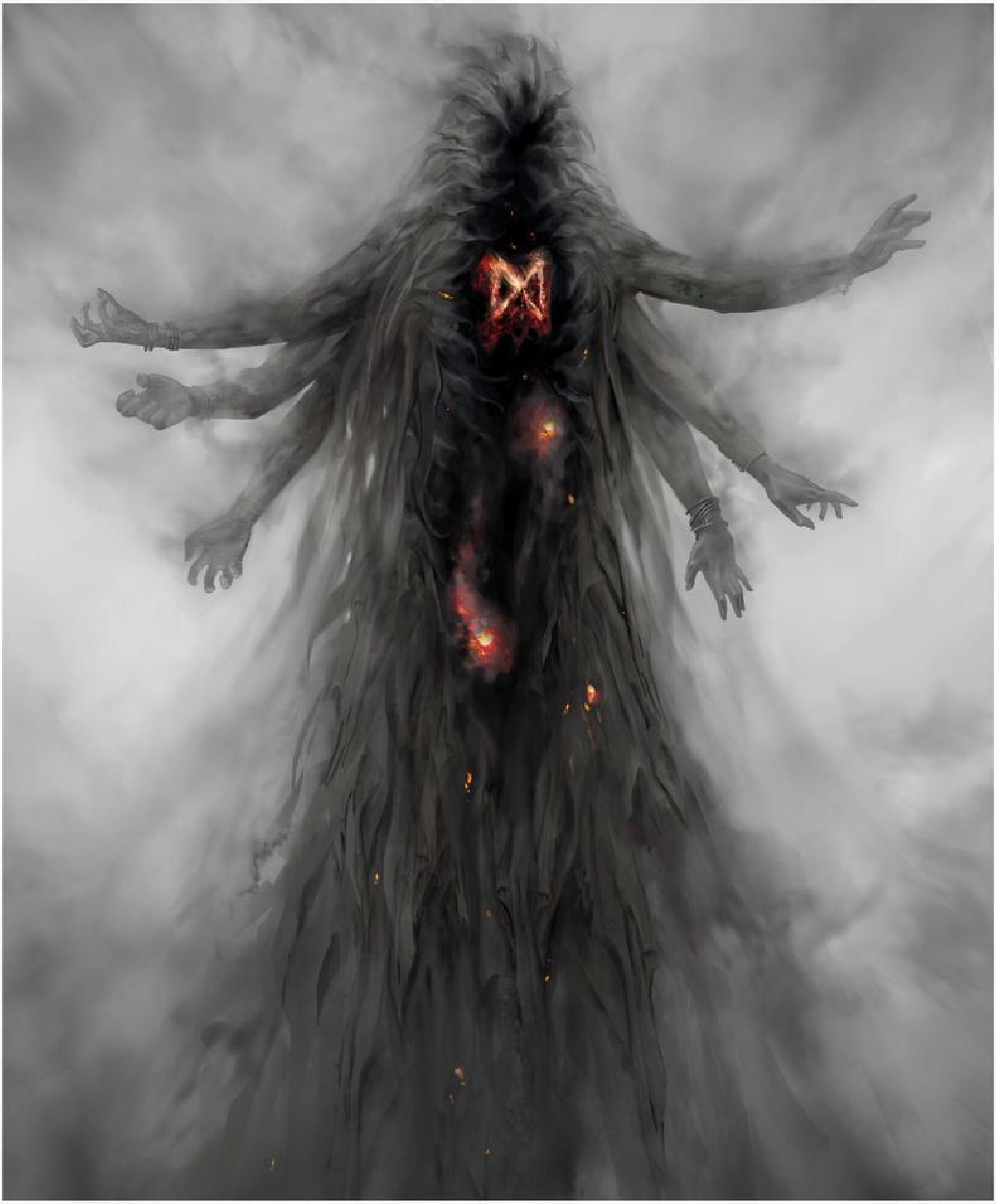
Fire giant explorations. Artists: Bjorn Hurri (Opus Artz) (top); Karl Lindberg (bottom)

Warrior Souls in combat concepts. Artists: Shan Qiao; Yefim Kligerman (opposite)





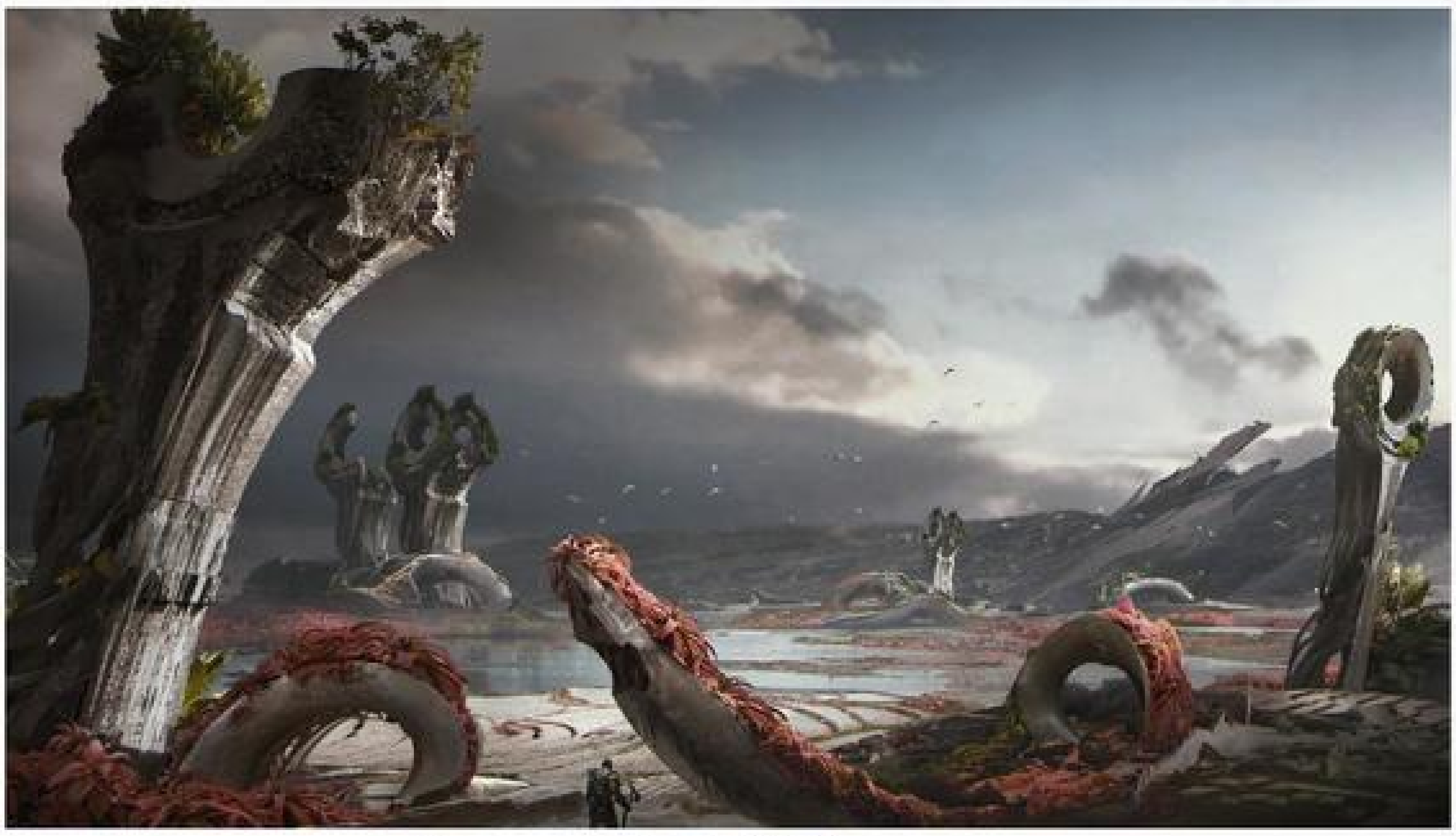
Warrior Souls would play a similar role as that of the Valkyries of the previous game. Qiao said, "We wanted to find anything we could to make this character look badass and interesting, to remind players of the horror they went through while playing against the Valkyries in *God of War*. The idea that stood out the most was the character attack. It would form different runes or stave patterns to summon the weapon for different attacks. The overall vibe we were going for was darker and bloodier, along with very complex armor details."

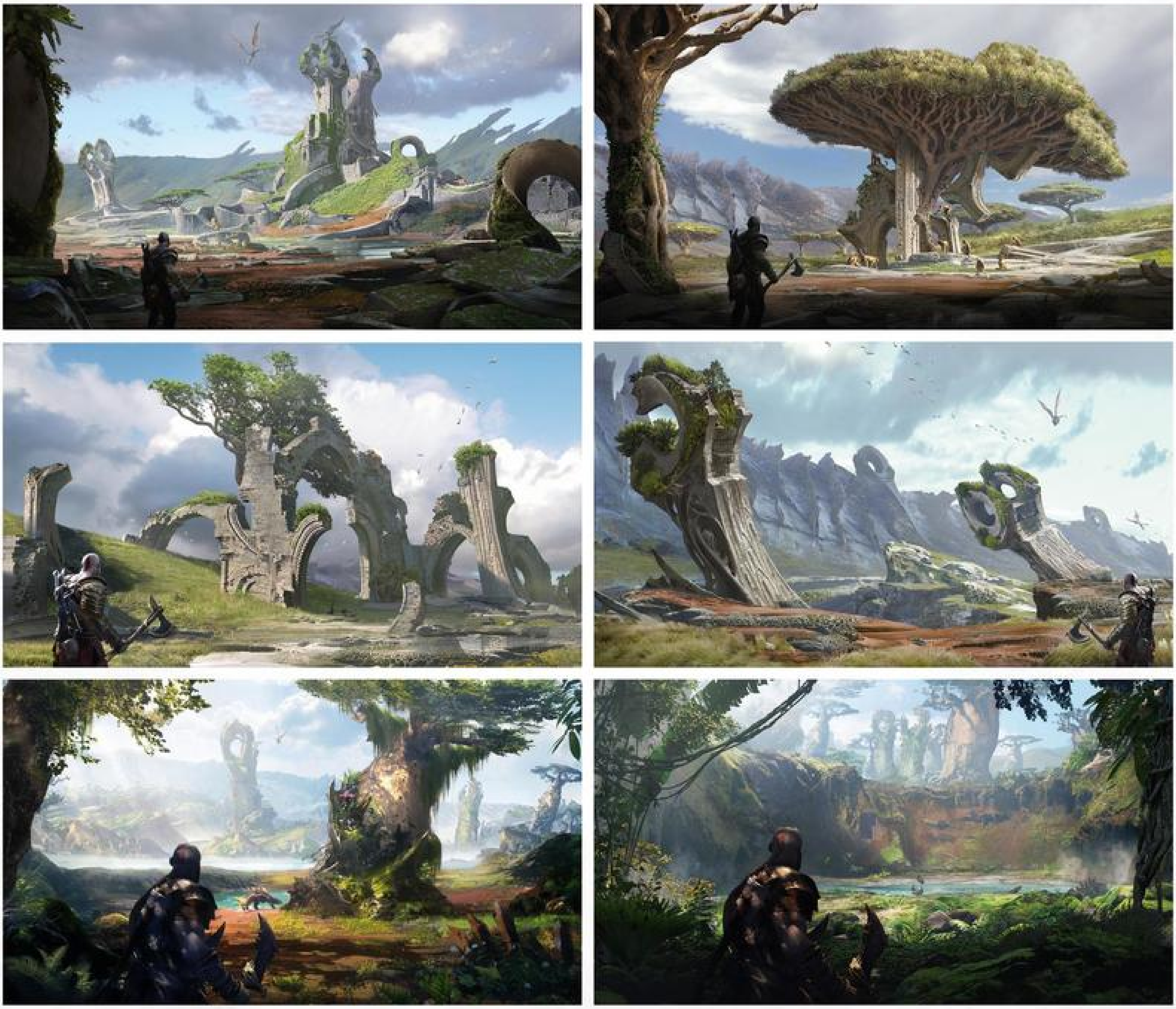


Though created as a concept for a Warrior Soul, this haunting design was later determined to be more suitable for a ghost creature. The final ghost design carried through the theme of the runes from the Warrior Souls, seen here shining in the creature's torso, which showcases how a concept can start for an entirely different character and go on to inspire or become other pieces in the game.

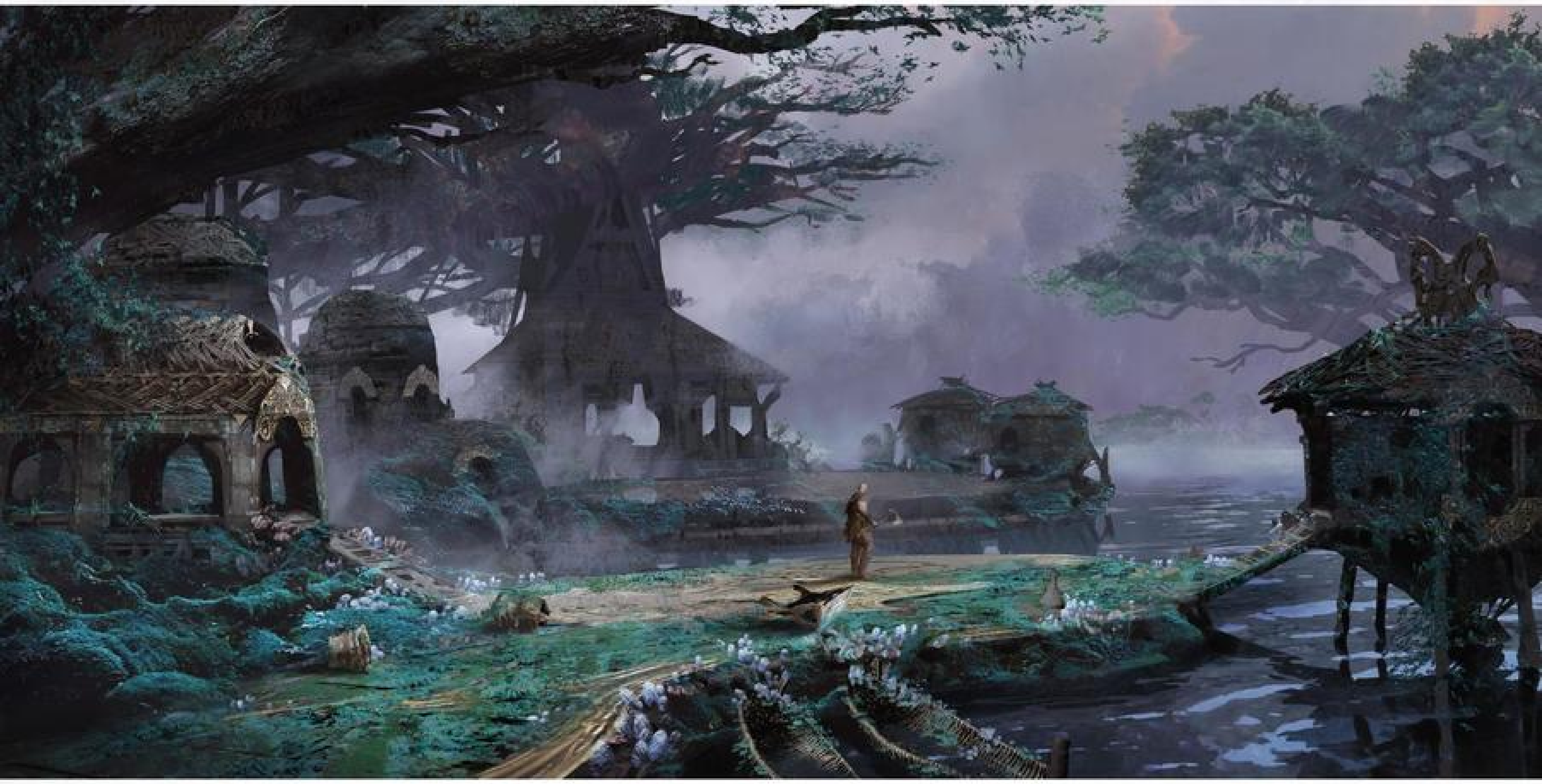
"This was a unique level for us, allowing us to push level design and gameplay in a way we haven't tried before with a more expansive open layout," Berliner said. "Environmentally, we wanted to show the remnants of the Vanir, to show a civilization that was once more advanced and capable of building impressive structures but was destroyed and pushed up into the forest above to live in huts that appear to have been more organically grown."

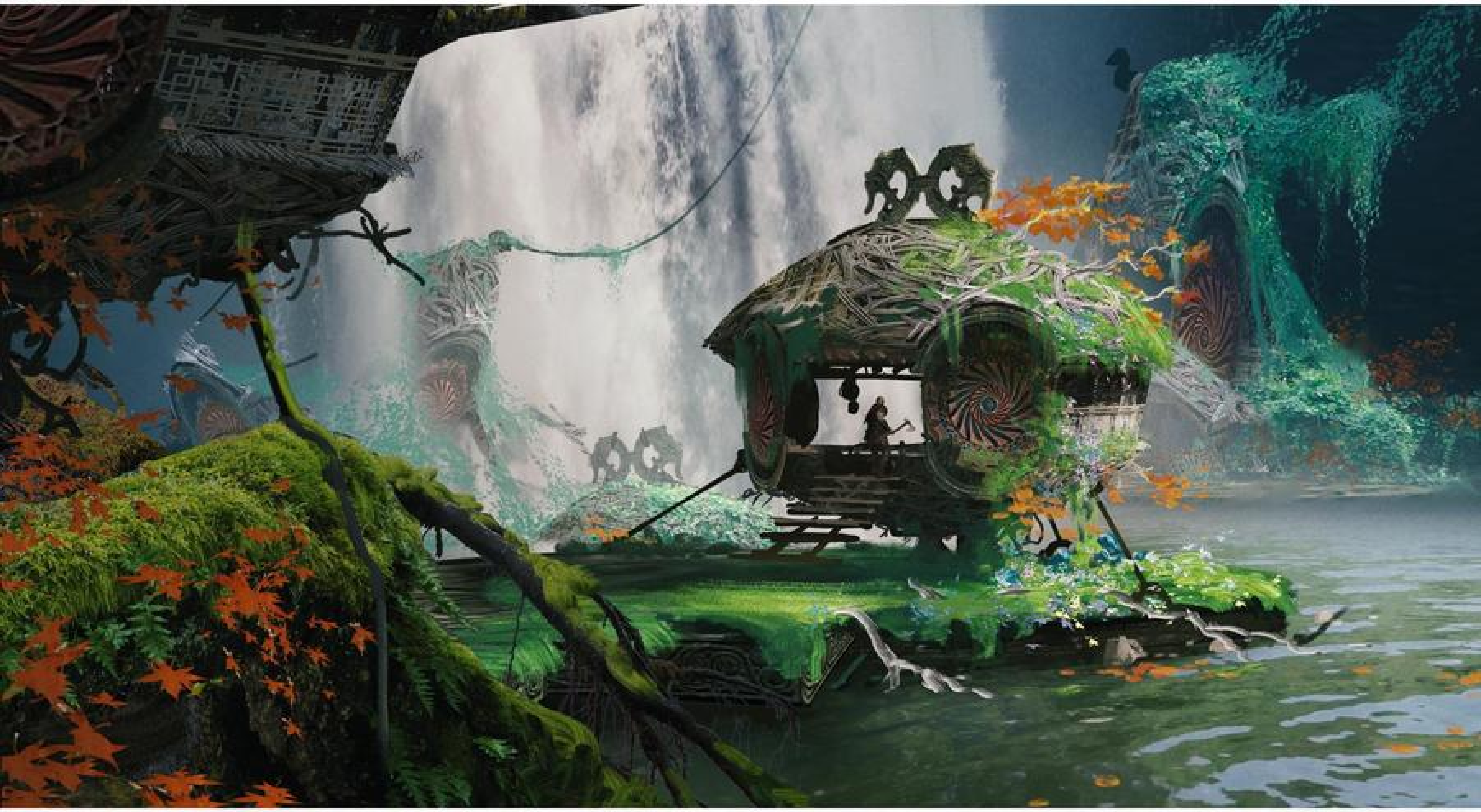
Concepts for the Vanir homes. Artists: Abe Taraky (top and middle); Annis Naeem (bottom)





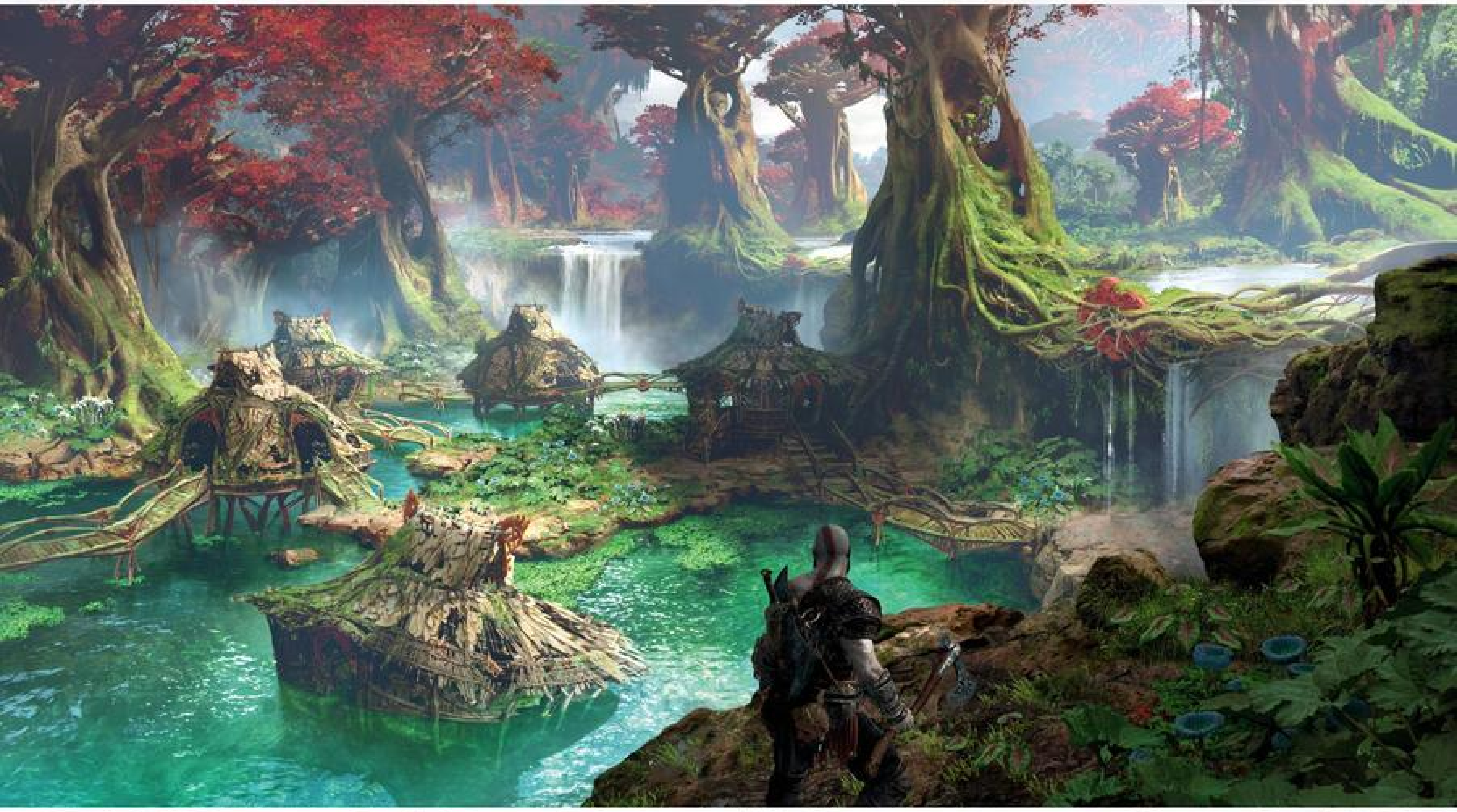
Exploring Vanaheim's verdant spaces. Artist: Luke Berliner

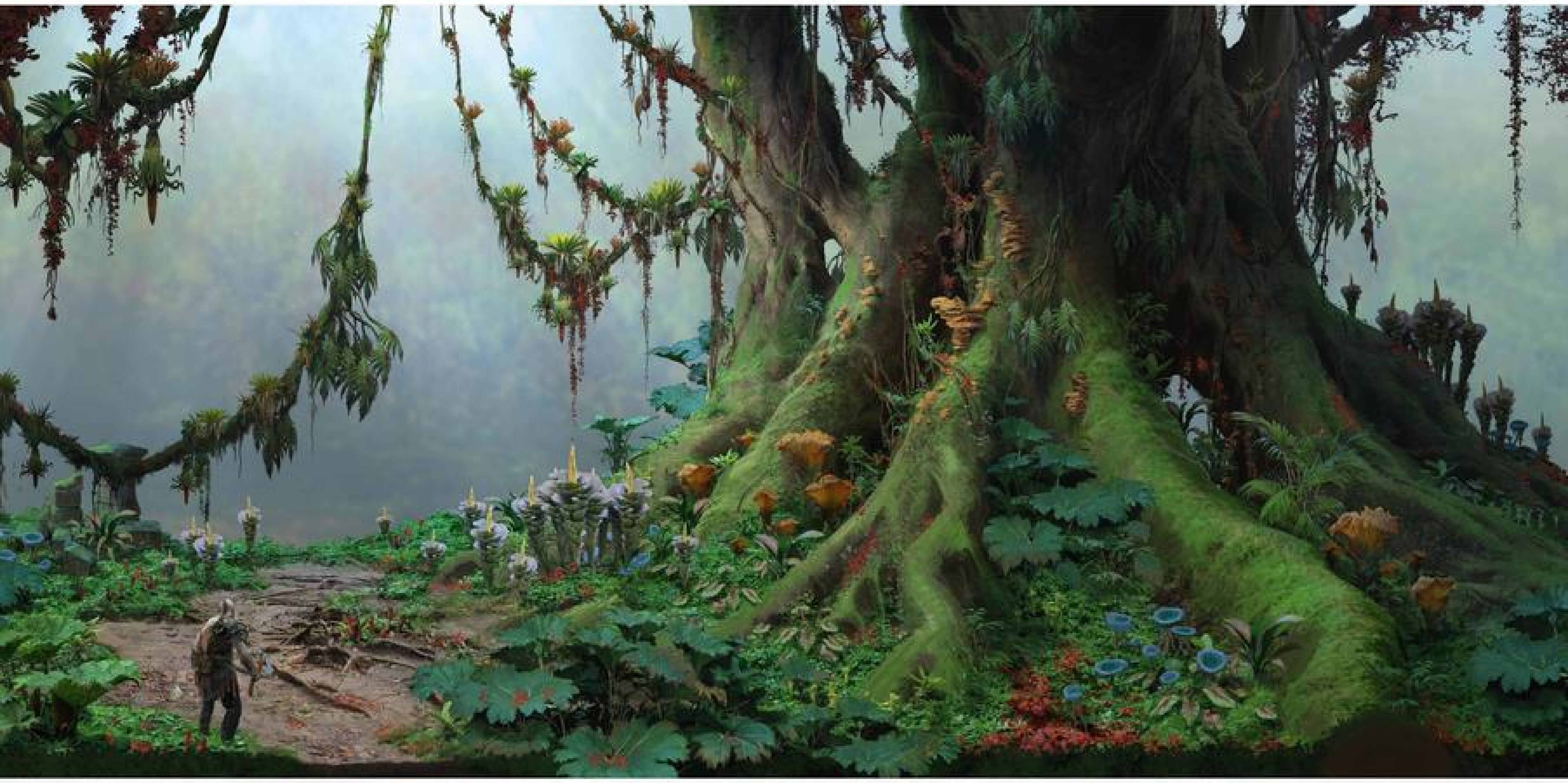




Vanaheim is very different from the other levels in the game. It appears as an unexpectedly lush destination in a story that is otherwise set in a brutal Nordic world—especially as Fimbulwinter's snow covers other realms. "It combines the same fantastical elements we try to add to all our levels and goes far beyond a jungle in the real world to create something new and unique," 3D environment artist Sup Choi said.

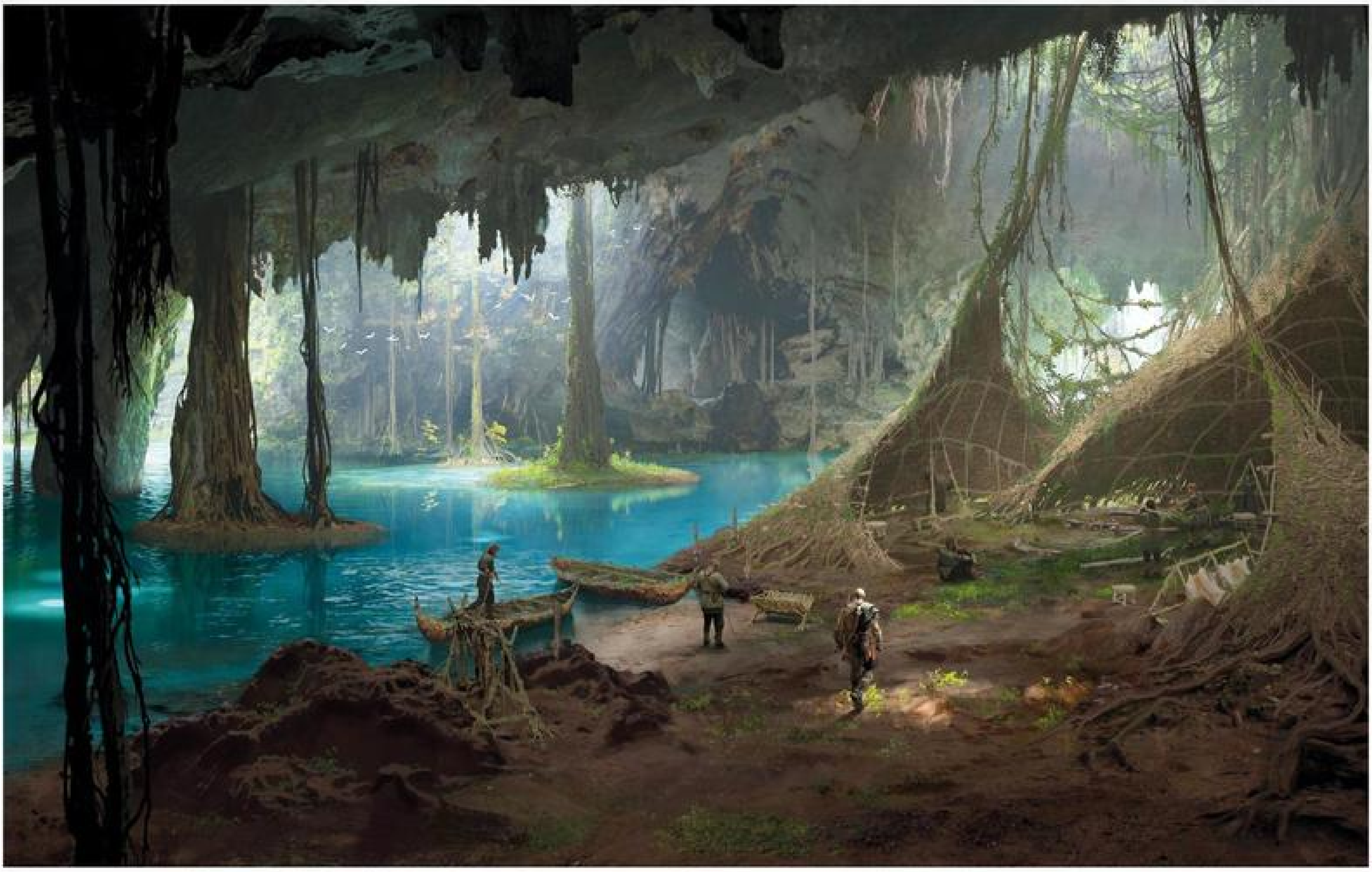
Vanaheim's water village. Artist: Mark Castanon

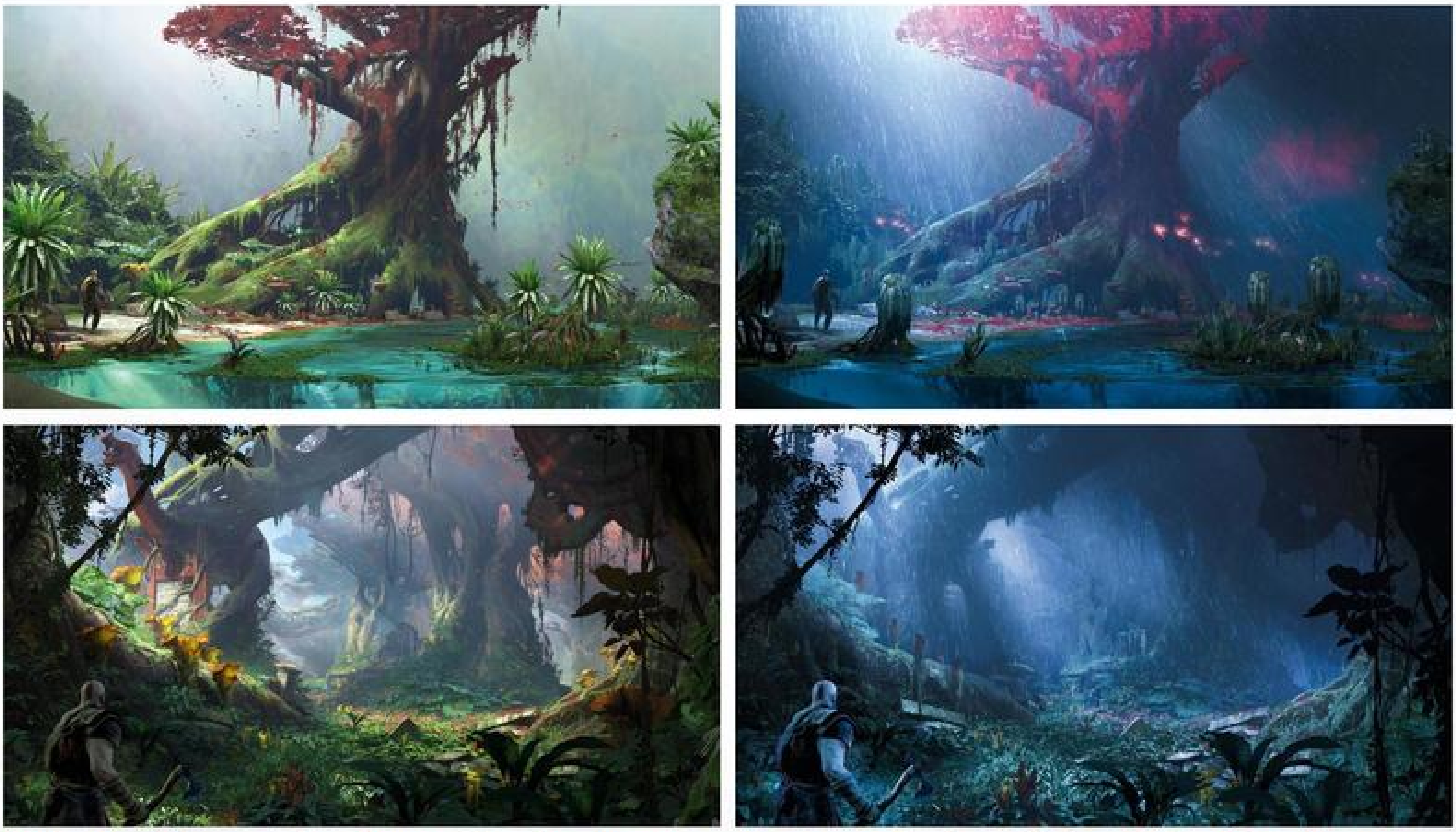




"Eventually in production we move from a 'blue sky' approach in our artwork, focused on establishing a greater visual direction, to working over level-design block-outs of rudimentary 3D geometry where we are essentially trying to interpolate that visual direction over actual gameplay spaces. The nature of this type of problem solving opens the door for even more interesting visual elements to occupy the space with. The water village above is an example of this," Castanon said.

Grotto and water village concepts. Artist: Mark Castanon



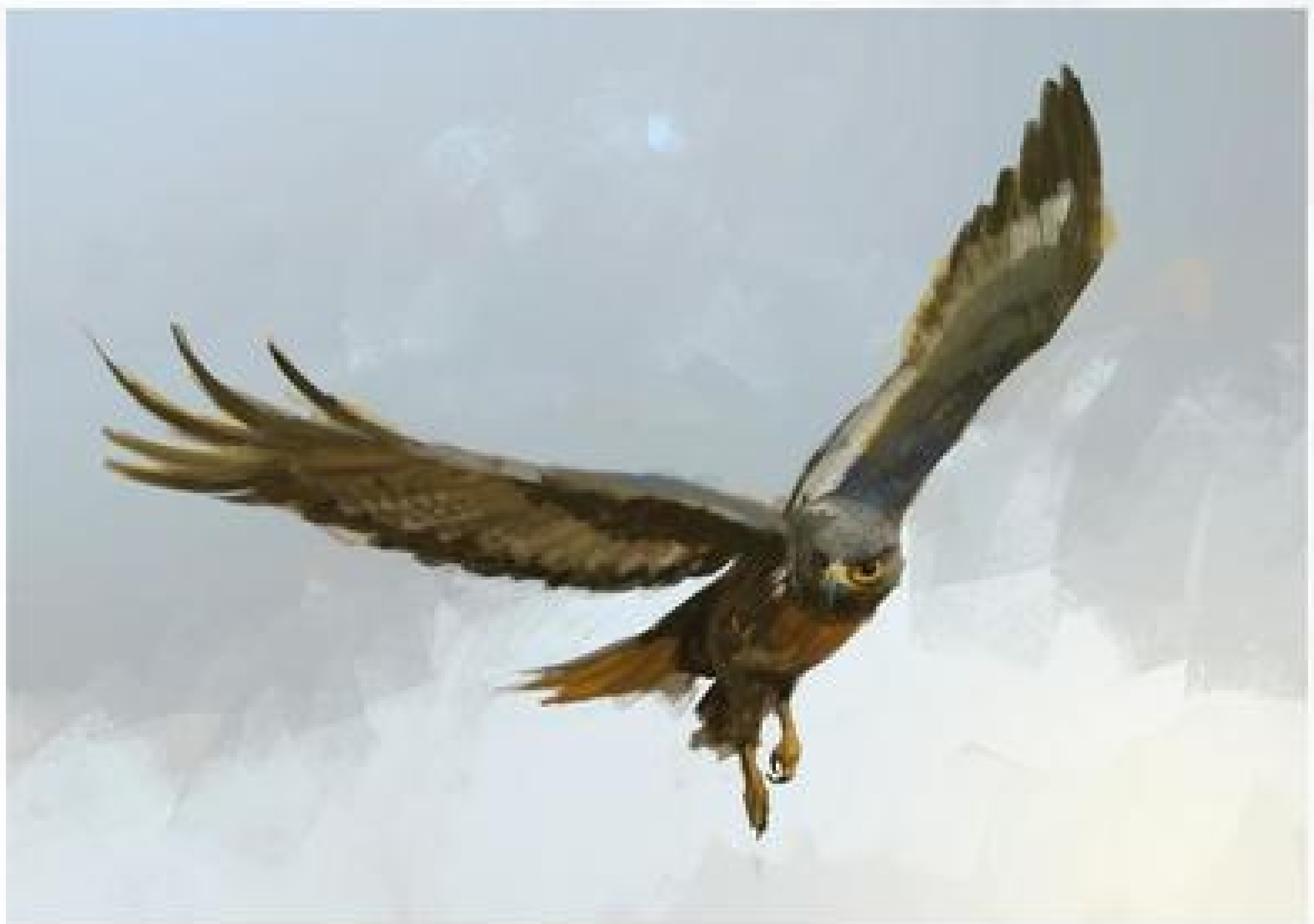


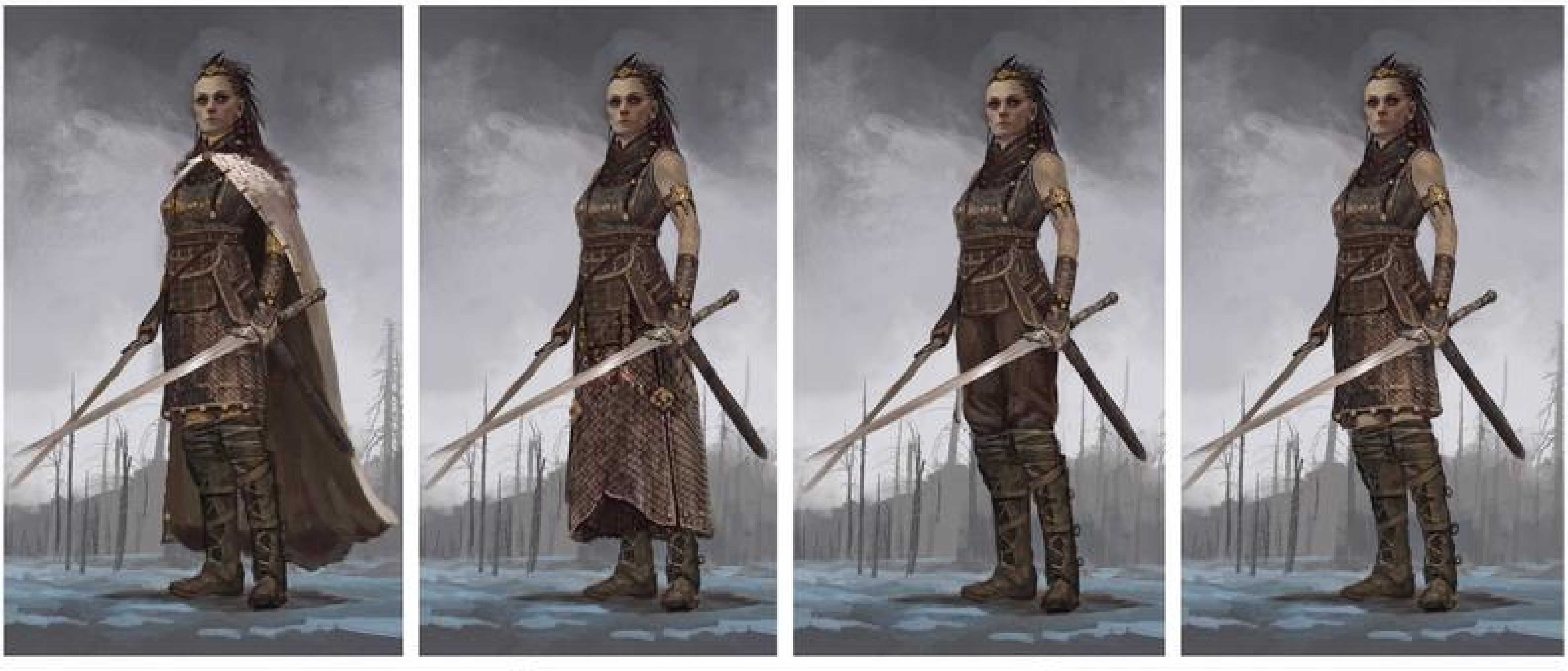
Vanaheim expanded in scope and gave the artists additional opportunities to imagine new areas anchored around the theme of a dense, lush jungle environment. Castanon completed a series of paintings focused on Vanaheim's unique vegetation. He also fleshed out areas such as the water village and the grotto, creating night-time versions of some paintings as the team explored incorporating a day and night cycle into the level.

FREYA

Freya (introduced as the Witch of the Woods in *God of War*) offered a warm and caring hand to Atreus whenever the youth needed assistance his father couldn't provide. But after Kratos killed her son, Baldur, Freya became riven by despair and heartbreak. Freya, who seems to be Kratos' equal in every relevant metric, has lost herself to anger and grief.

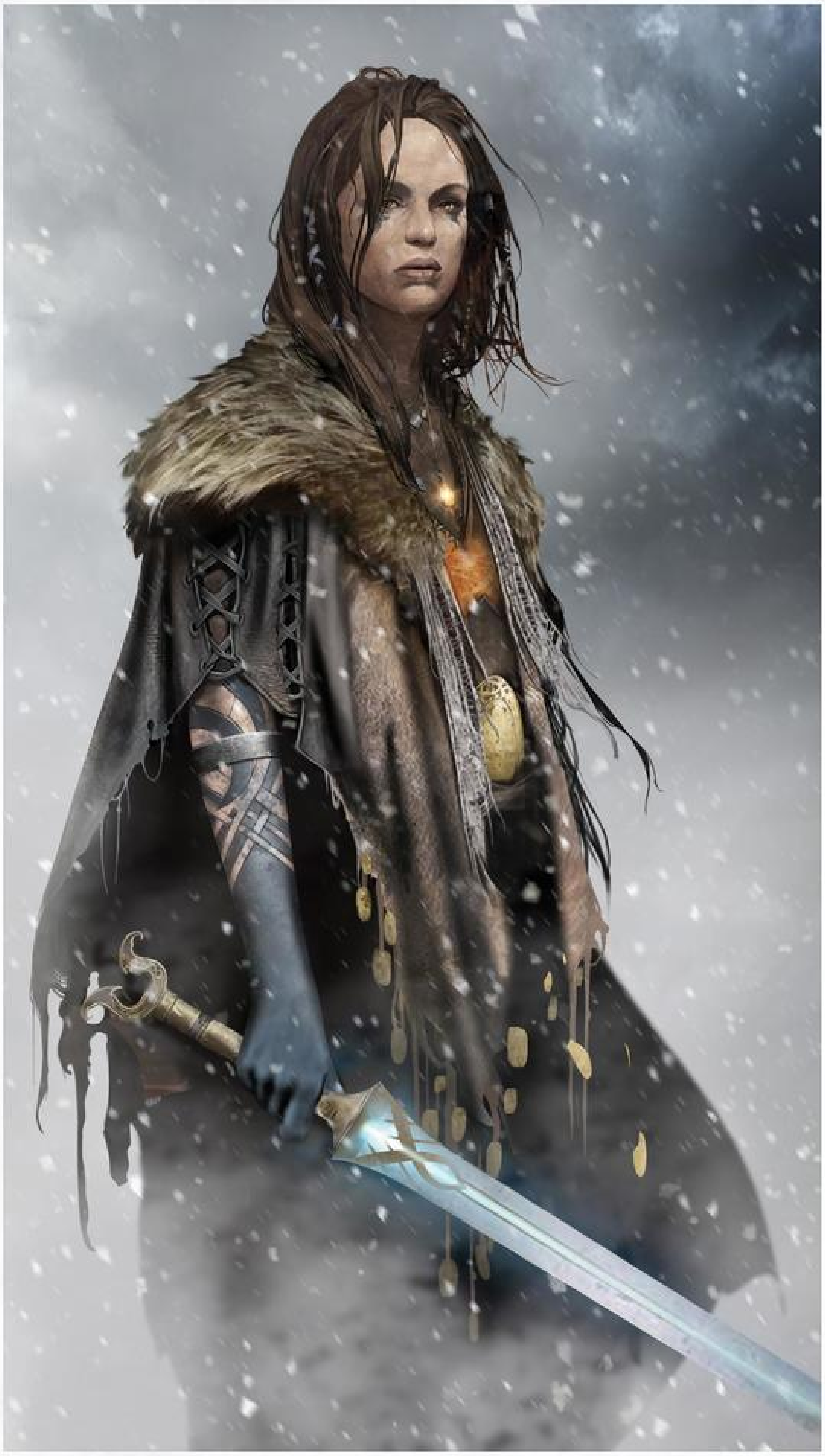
The artists strove to communicate this darker side of her character with the look of a determined warrior, hinting at the trauma she's experienced since the previous game while keeping aspects of the kinder, warm person still present under the heartbreak. The team went through a whole range of how dark to take her to keep her in line with her story.

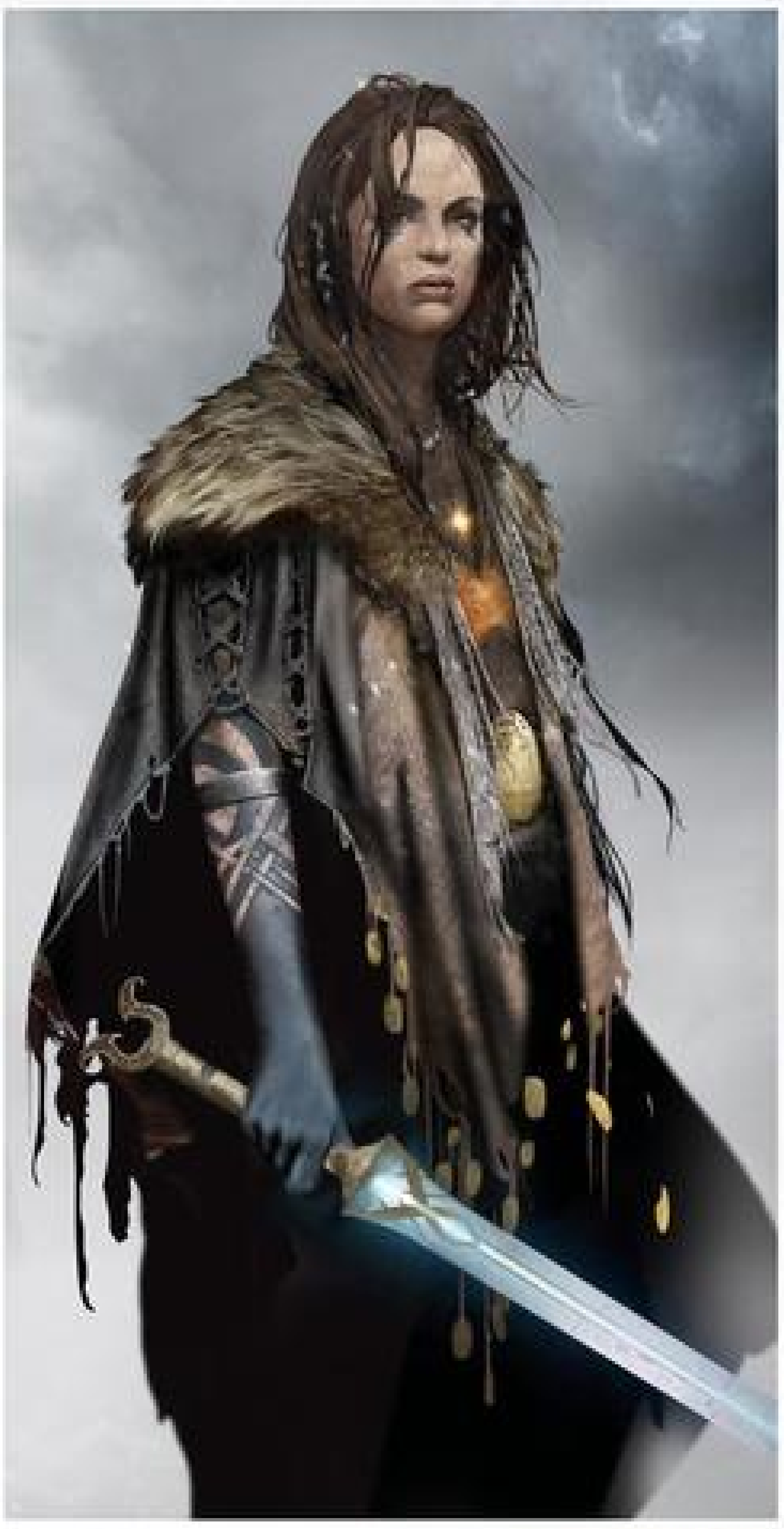


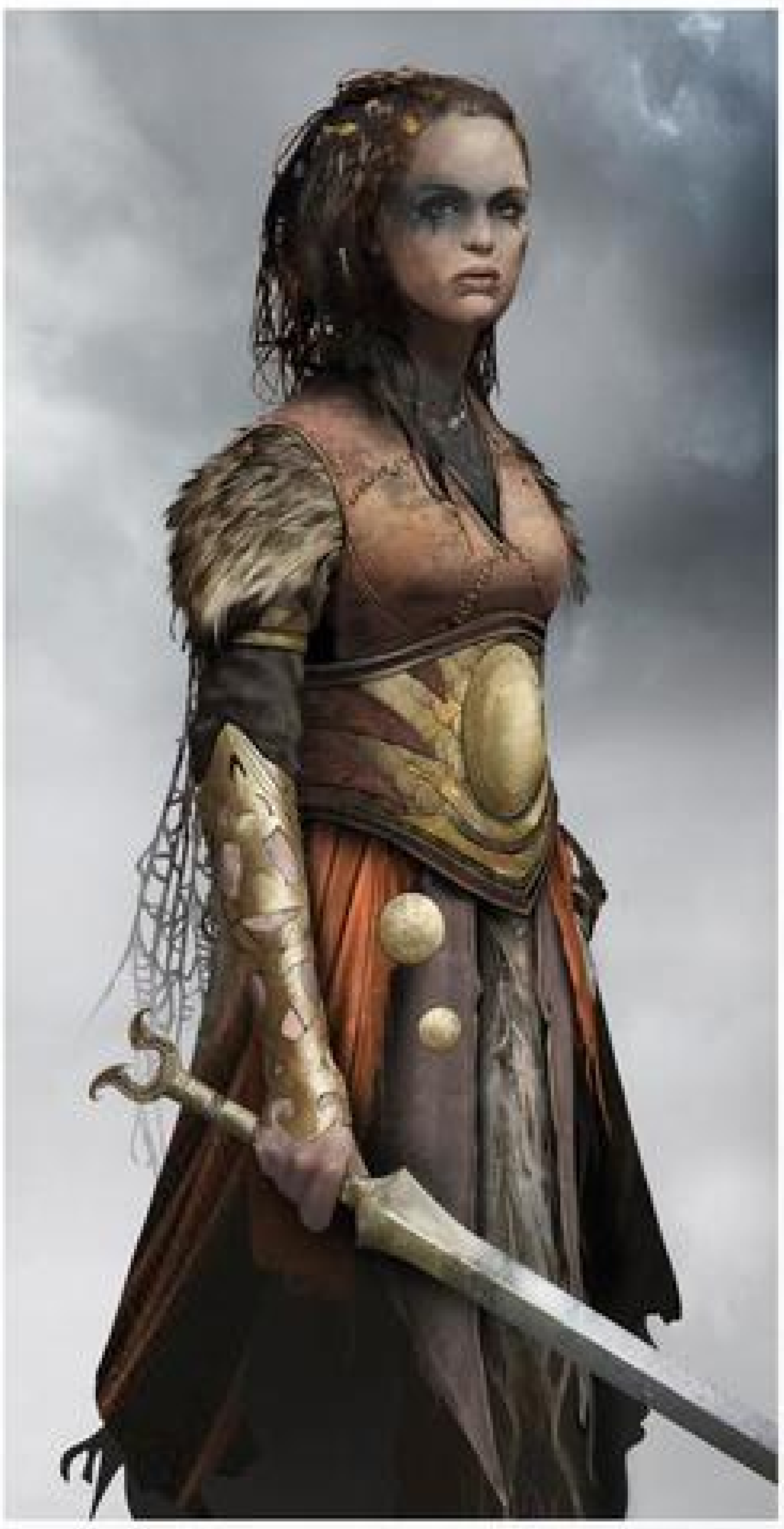


Freya costume exploration. Artist: Vance Kovacs

Freya stands ready for battle. Artist: Dela Longfish

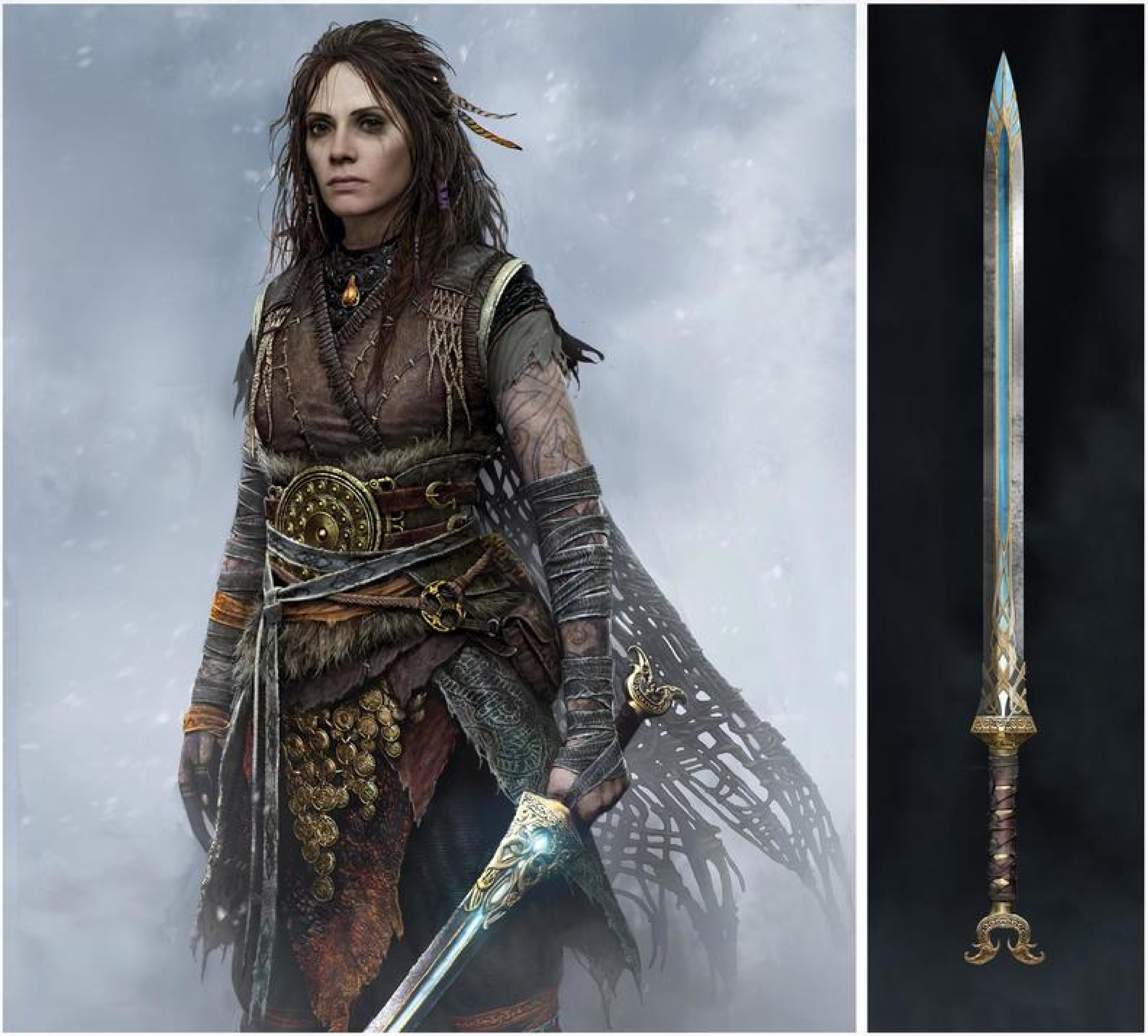


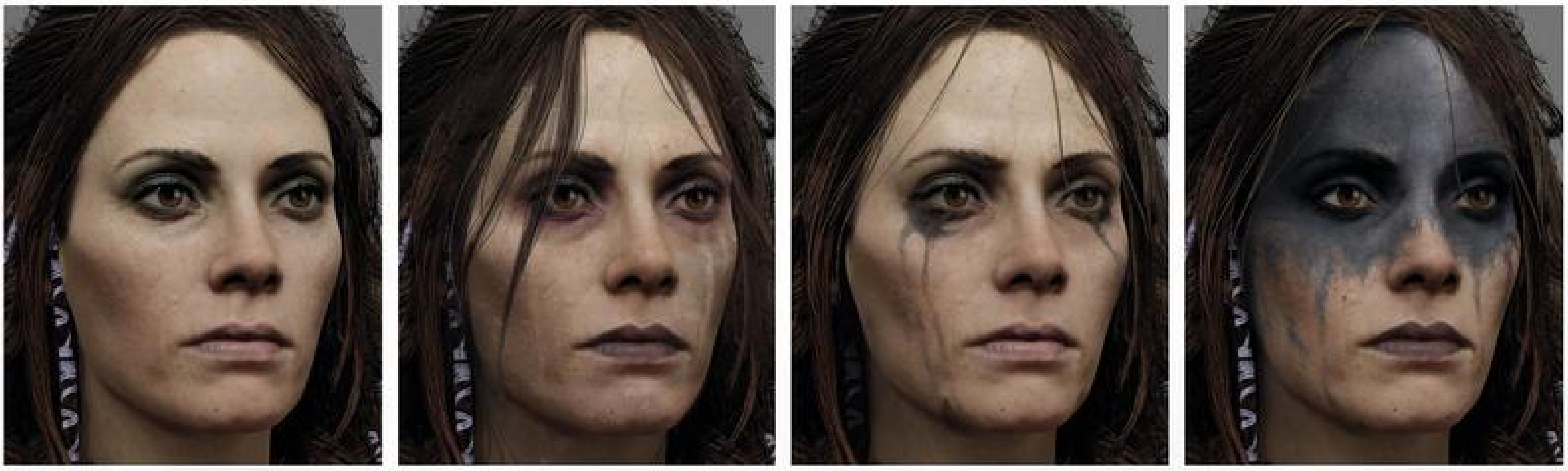




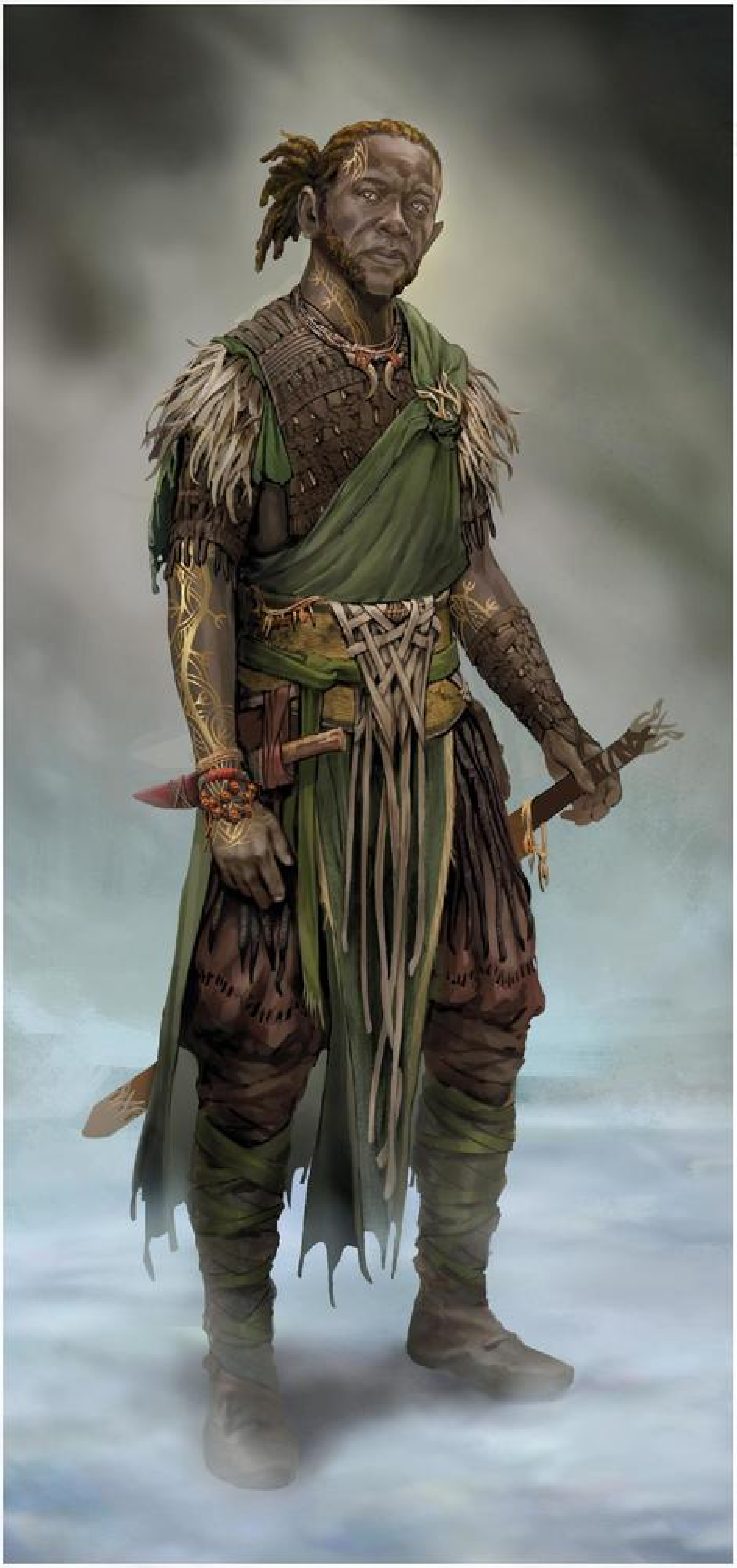
"Freya's design needed to reflect what she has been going through since the last game. She has been trying to work through Baldur's death, and with that she incorporated some of his elements into her own costume to make her never forget what happened. The costume is made for hunting and is ready for combat, ensuring she has the elements she needs to feel strong and be on par with Kratos," said Grassetti.

Freya's sword. Artists: Shan Qiao (top); Dela Longfish (bottom)





The look for Freya in this game needed to convey the impact of her profound bereavement. Qiao explained, "No longer a friend to the heroes, she is a mother desperately on the hunt for revenge. Her look became more covered up and aggressive. On her face you can see that layer of grief with a bit of tearstains. I got the amazing render from Rafael Grassetti and was lucky enough to deliver this character concept to its finish line, along with the weapon design."

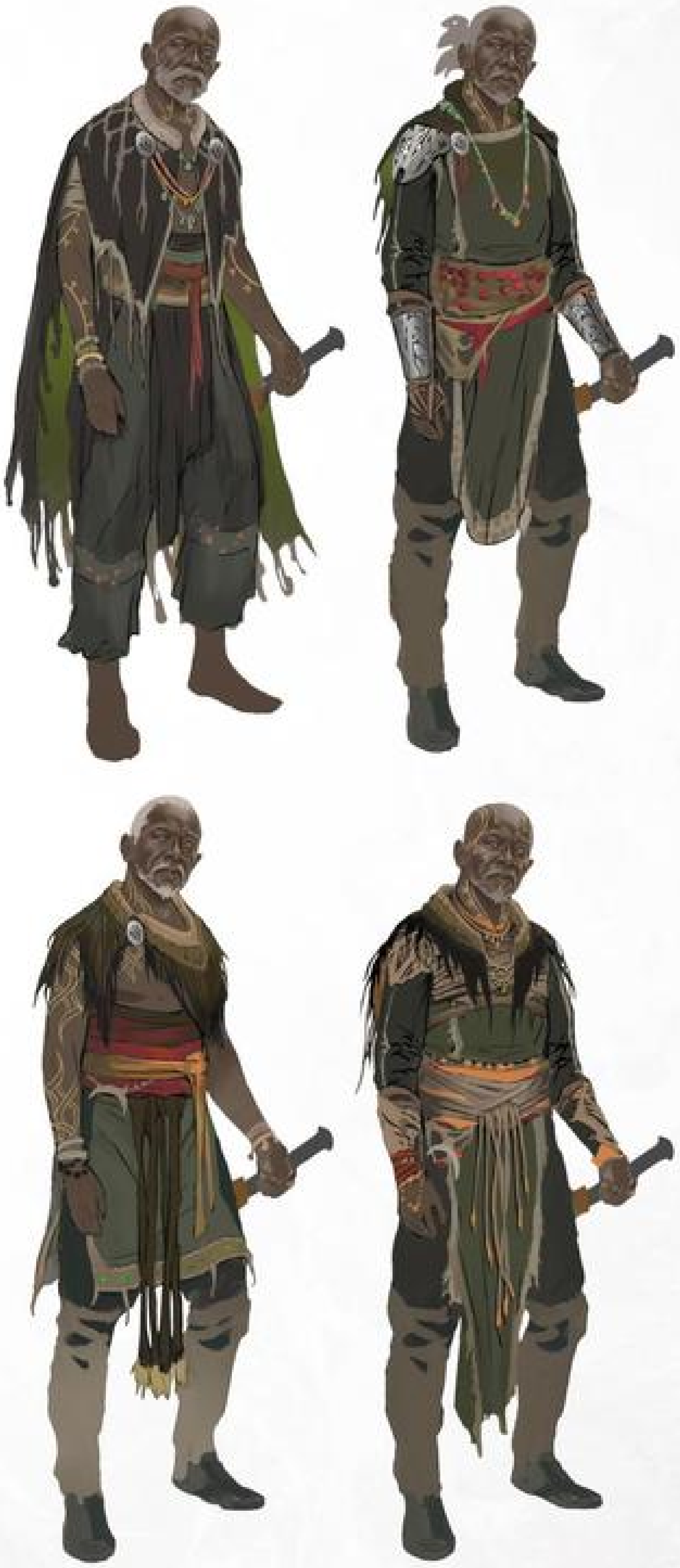


Bringing Hildisvini to his human form. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

HILDISVINI

As the human form of Freya's boar from the previous game, Hildisvini has the same eye color and golden tattoo on his arm and neck to make that connection clear. Kratos and Atreus helped Freya save the boar after Atreus mistakenly struck him with an arrow. Here, in his human form, Hildisvini serves as Freyr's adviser.

Kligerman said, "I wanted to bring a dignity and intelligence to his design. He's not a hand-to-hand fighter but more of a strategist, so he lacks any metal plate armor and opts for a woven set under his green sash. He lives in Vanaheim, so every piece of clothing and detail was designed with that in mind."

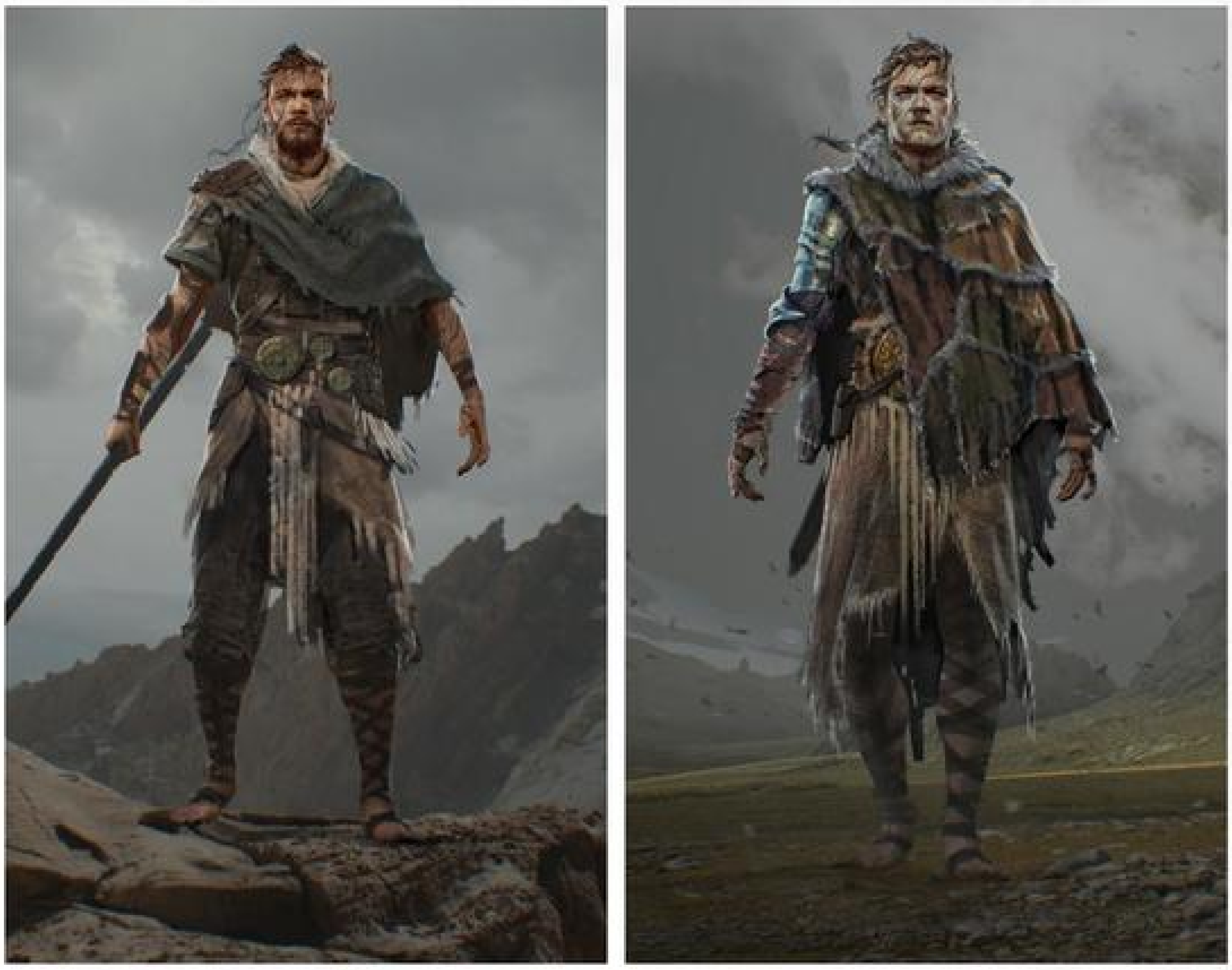


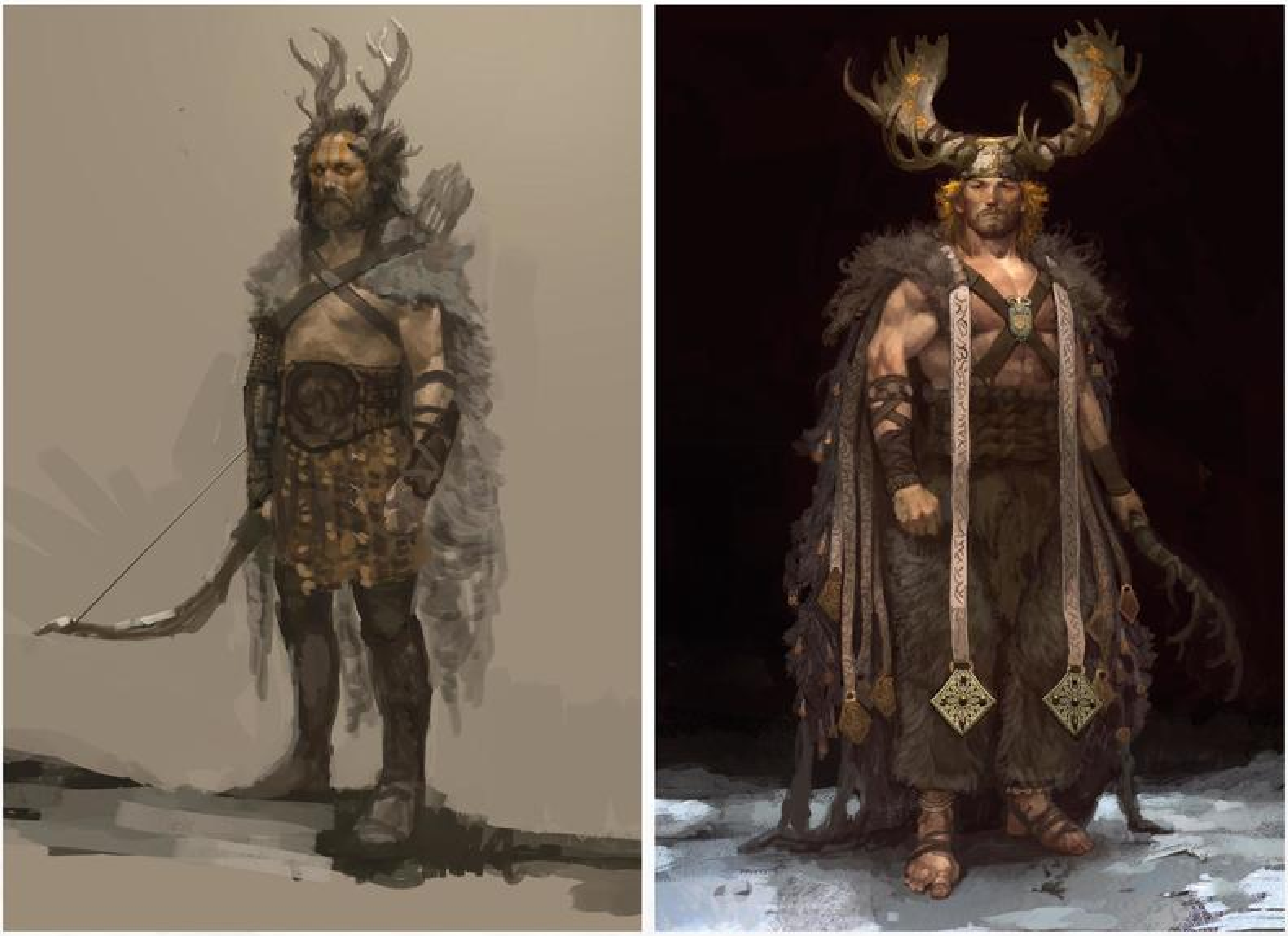
FREYR

While Freya has been occupied with personal matters and absent from Vanaheim, her twin brother Freyr has had to carry the responsibility of protecting the realm. Despite overwhelming odds, Freyr continues to lead those in Vanaheim who want to save the realm from the invading Aesir. He's operated under the continuous pressure of the war between the Aesir and the Vanir for some time.

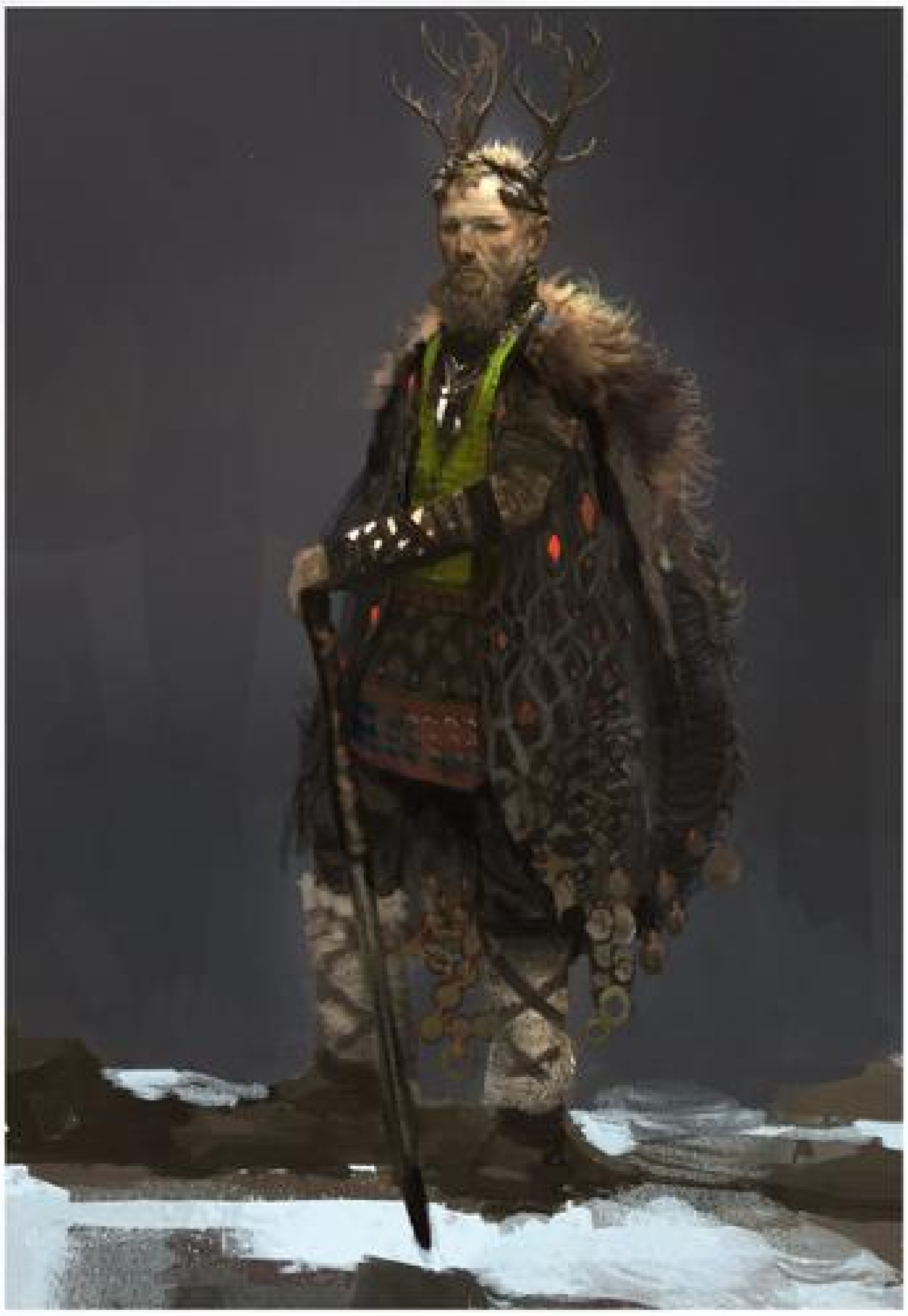
All of these responsibilities sit on Freyr's shoulders. Longfish said, "Fighting a resistance against those who want to destroy the Vanir, without his sister, and the years of constant battles weigh heavily on him—it's evident throughout his design."

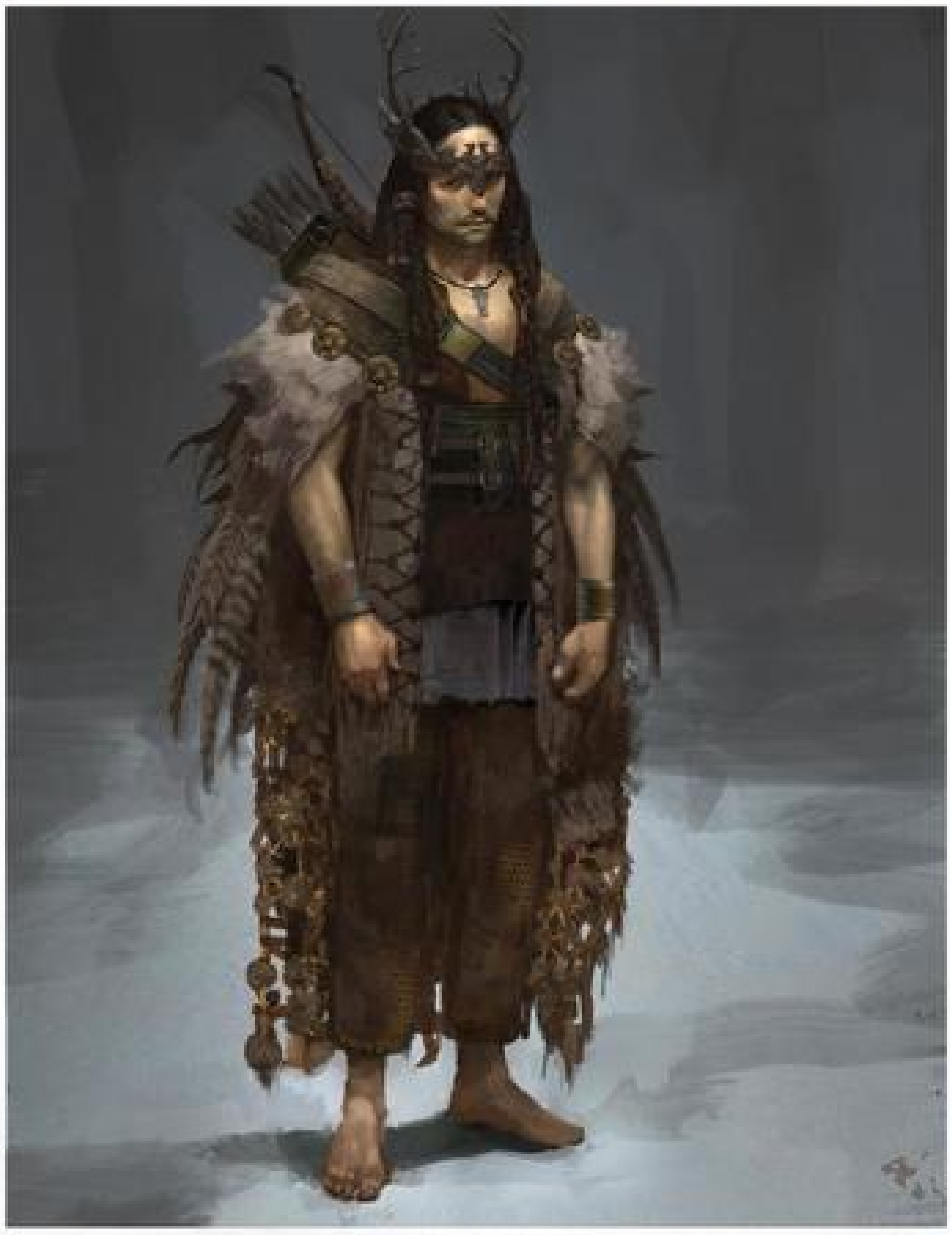
Warrior Freyr concept art. Artists: Karl Lindberg (top); Vance Kovacs (bottom)

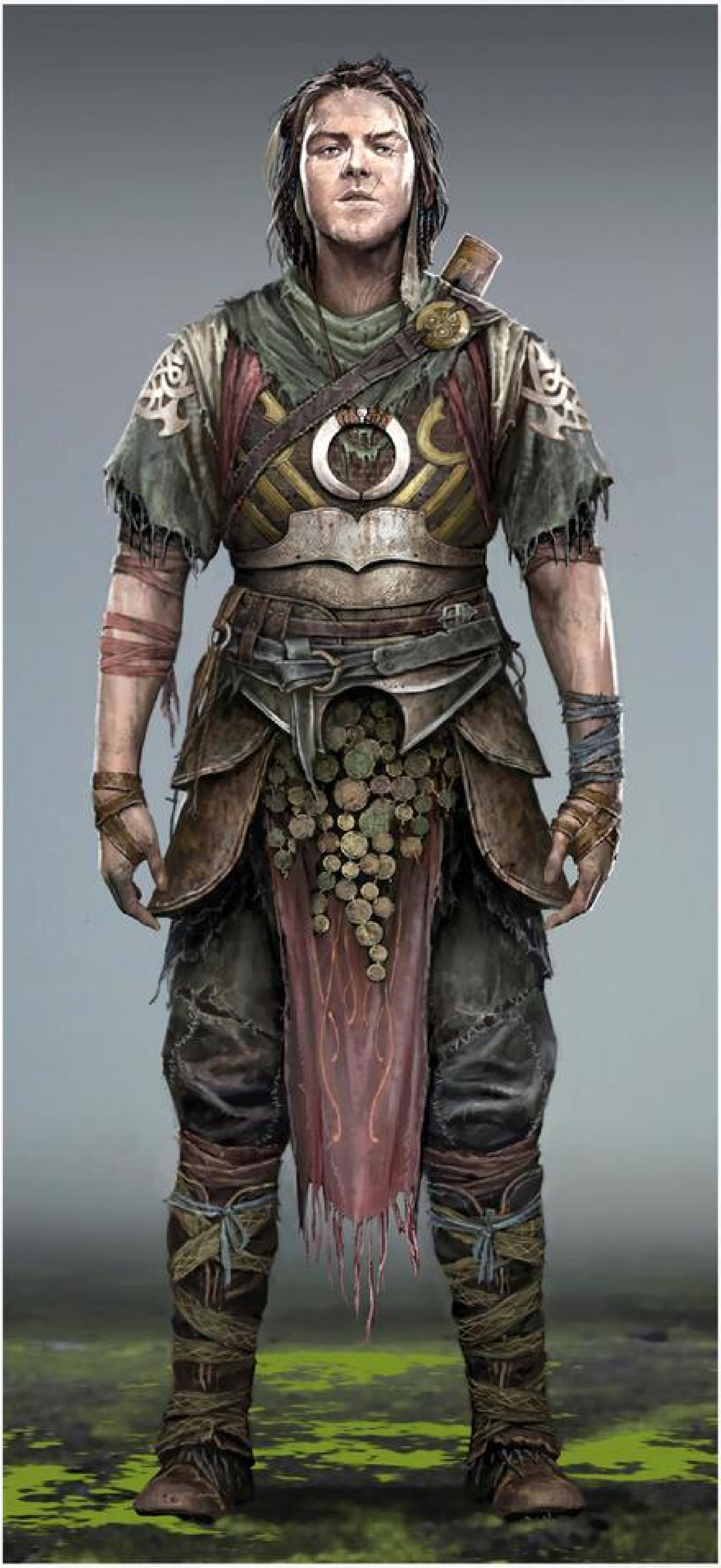




Freyr costume explorations. Artists: Vance Kovacs (left); Shan Qiao (right)

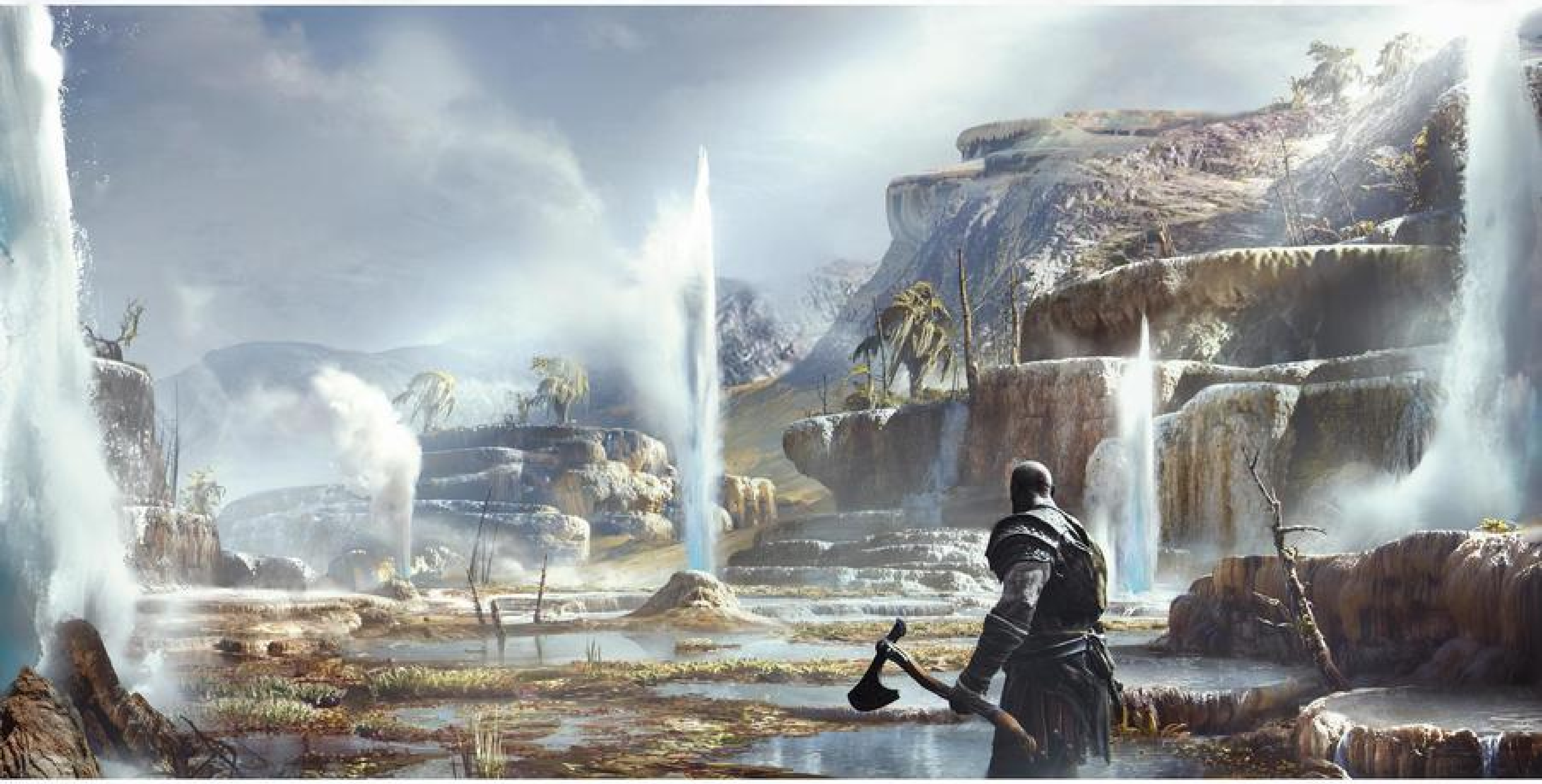


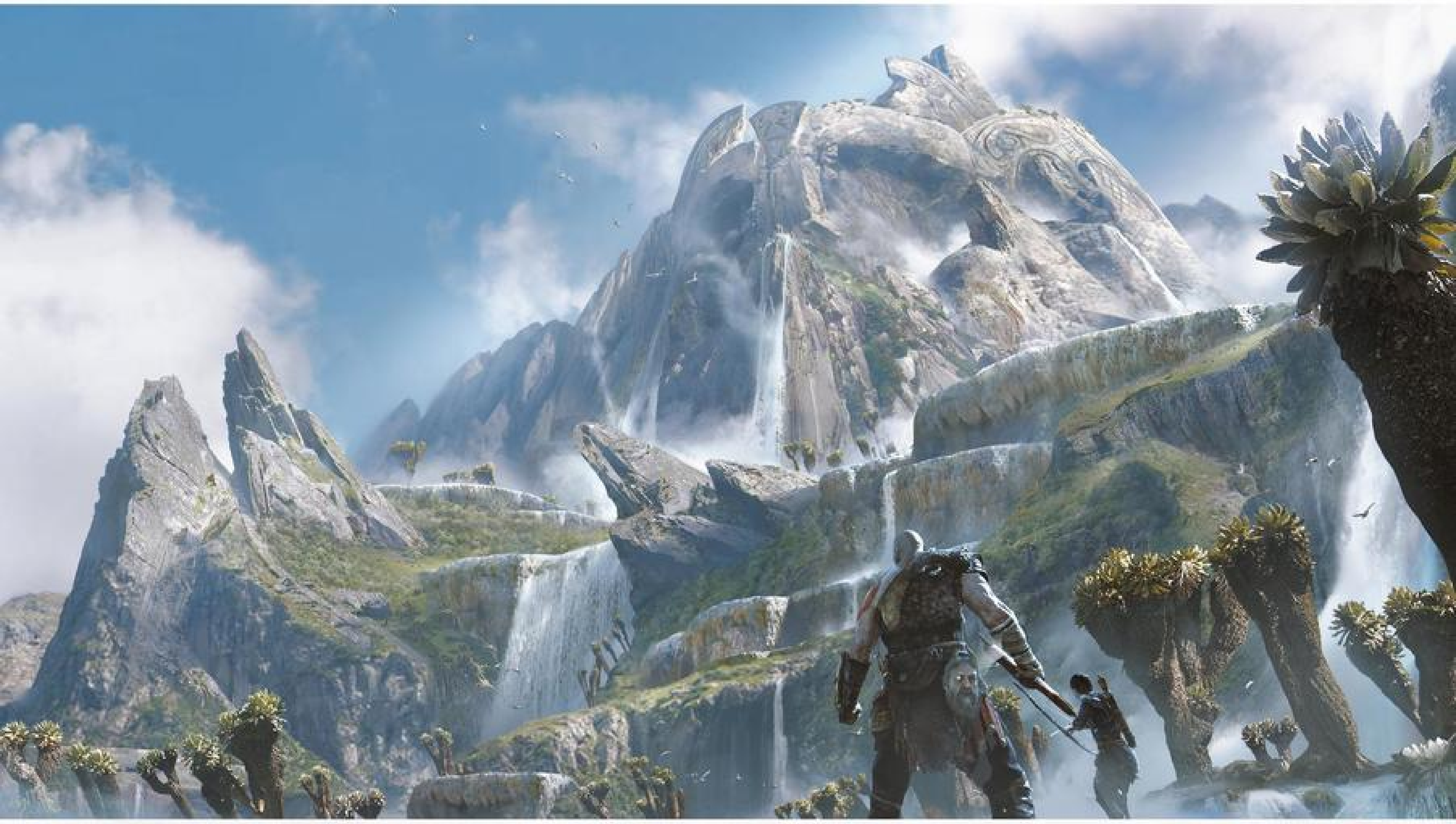




As the character artists brought Freyr closer to the finish line, they emphasized his connection to Freya. "The coins on the skirt and the overall Vanir style of cloth wrapping played an important role in this," Qiao said. "His identity as a prince was also reflected in the metal plate and decorative pattern on the cloth. It was tricky to find that balance between his leadership role and his inexperience."

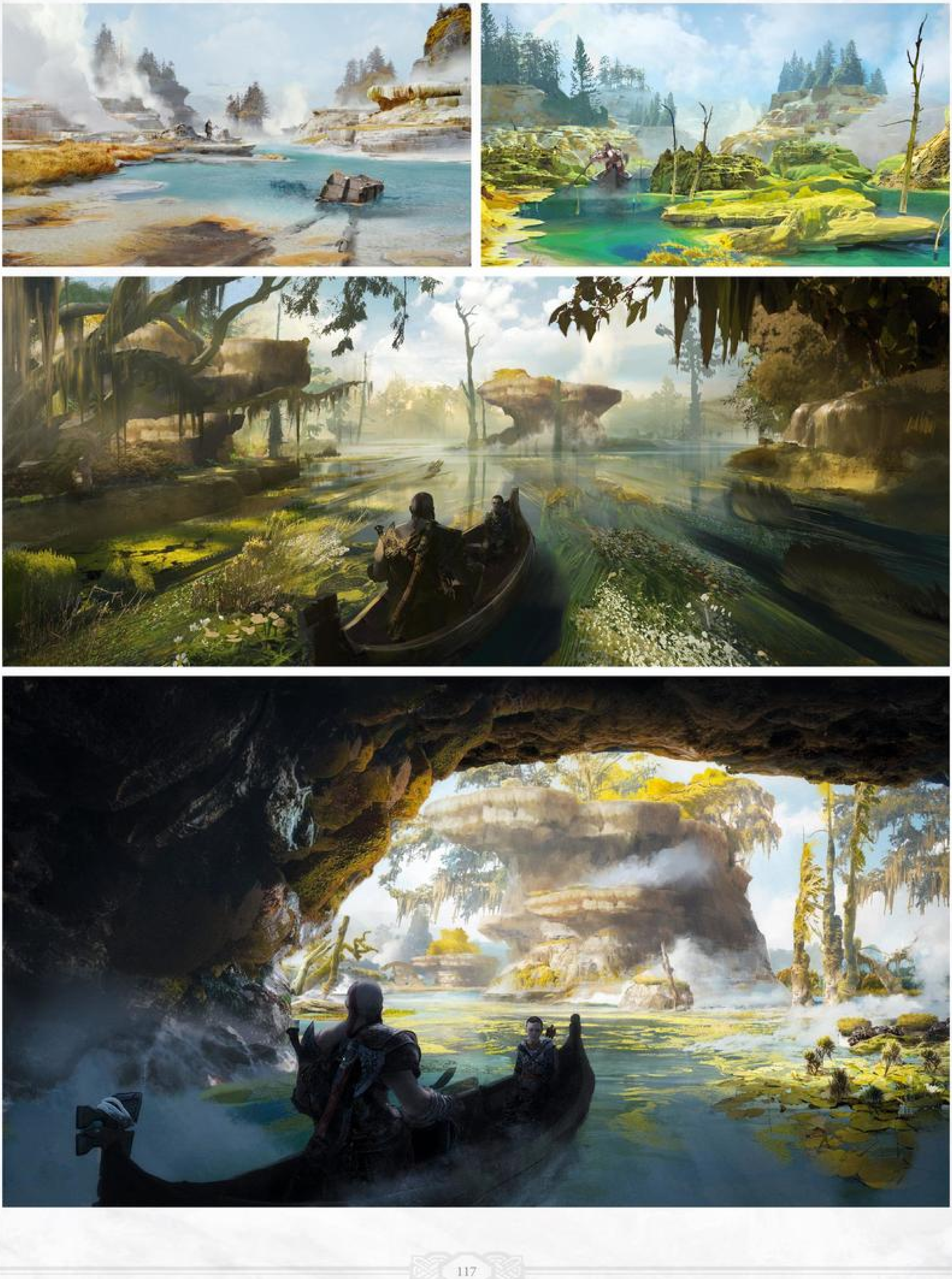
Concepts for cascading falls. Artist: Abe Taraky



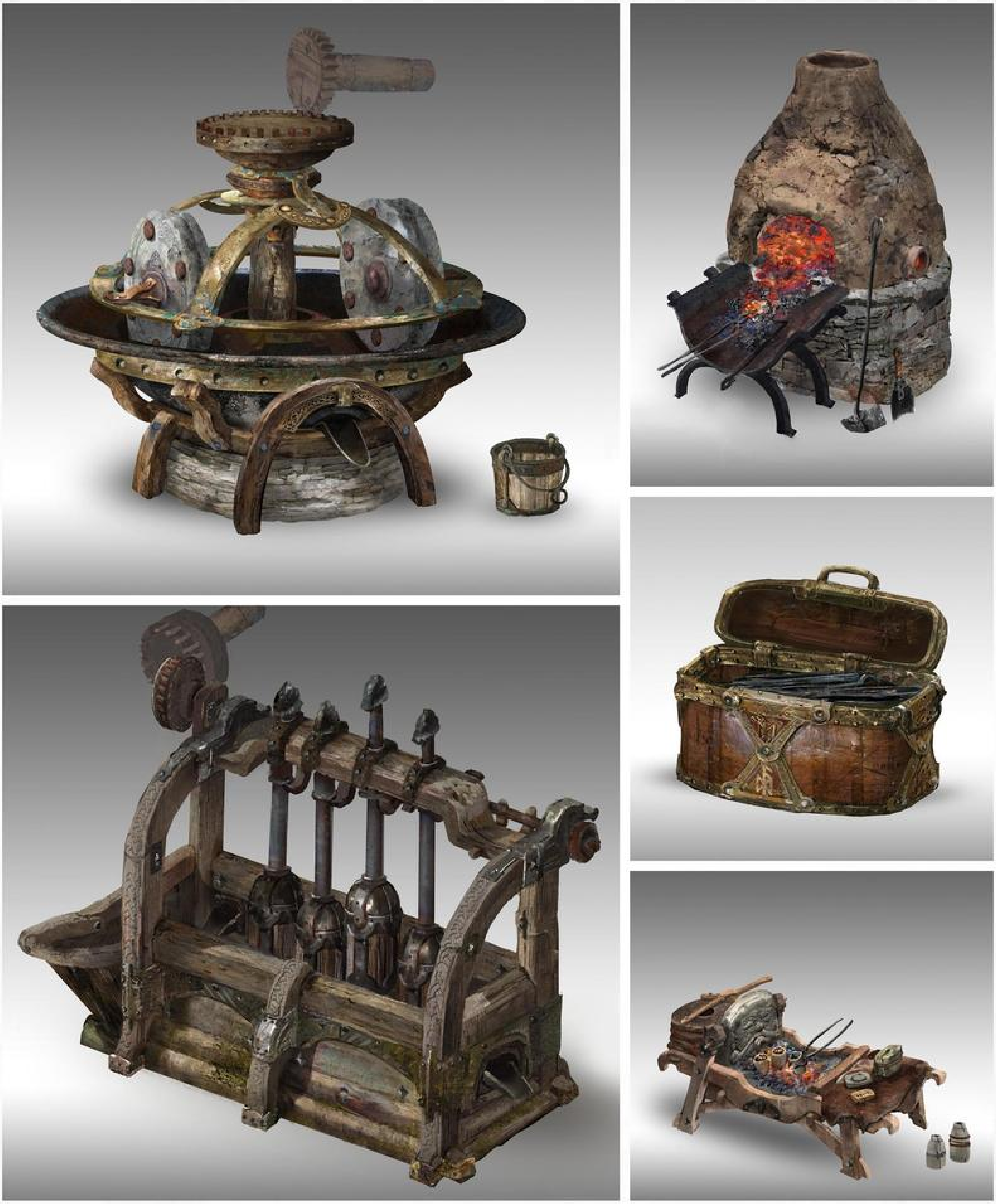


"A big component of our thought process in establishing the look of each realm is what inspiration we can find from the beauty of real-world locations," Castanon said. "One area we looked at was the sulfur fields of Ethiopia. Ultimately as the scope of Svartalfheim grew, this only inspired one section of the realm."

Concepts for Svartalfheim's springs. Artists: Luke Berliner, Annis Naeem (top left); Annis Naeem (top right, middle, and bottom)

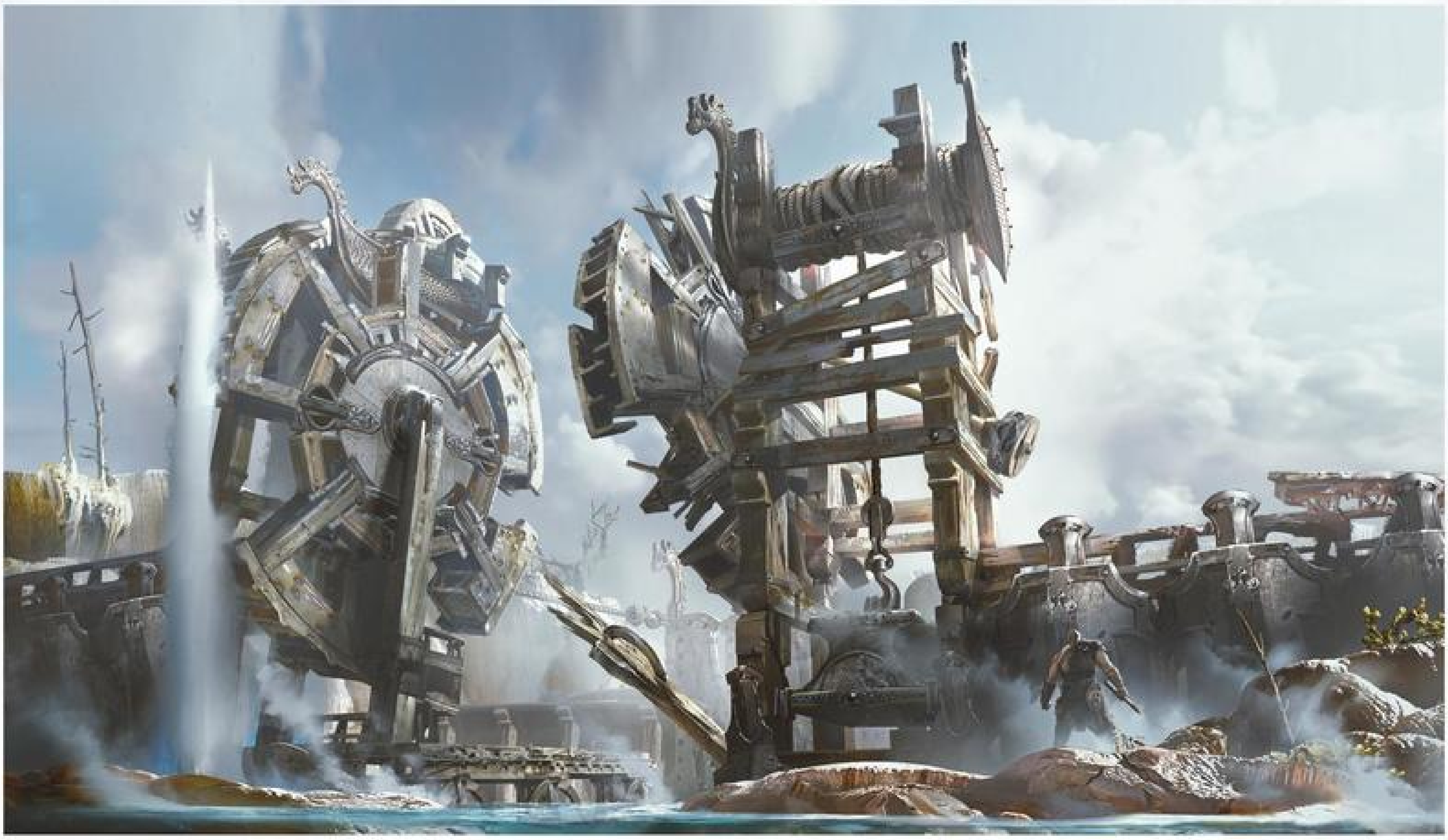


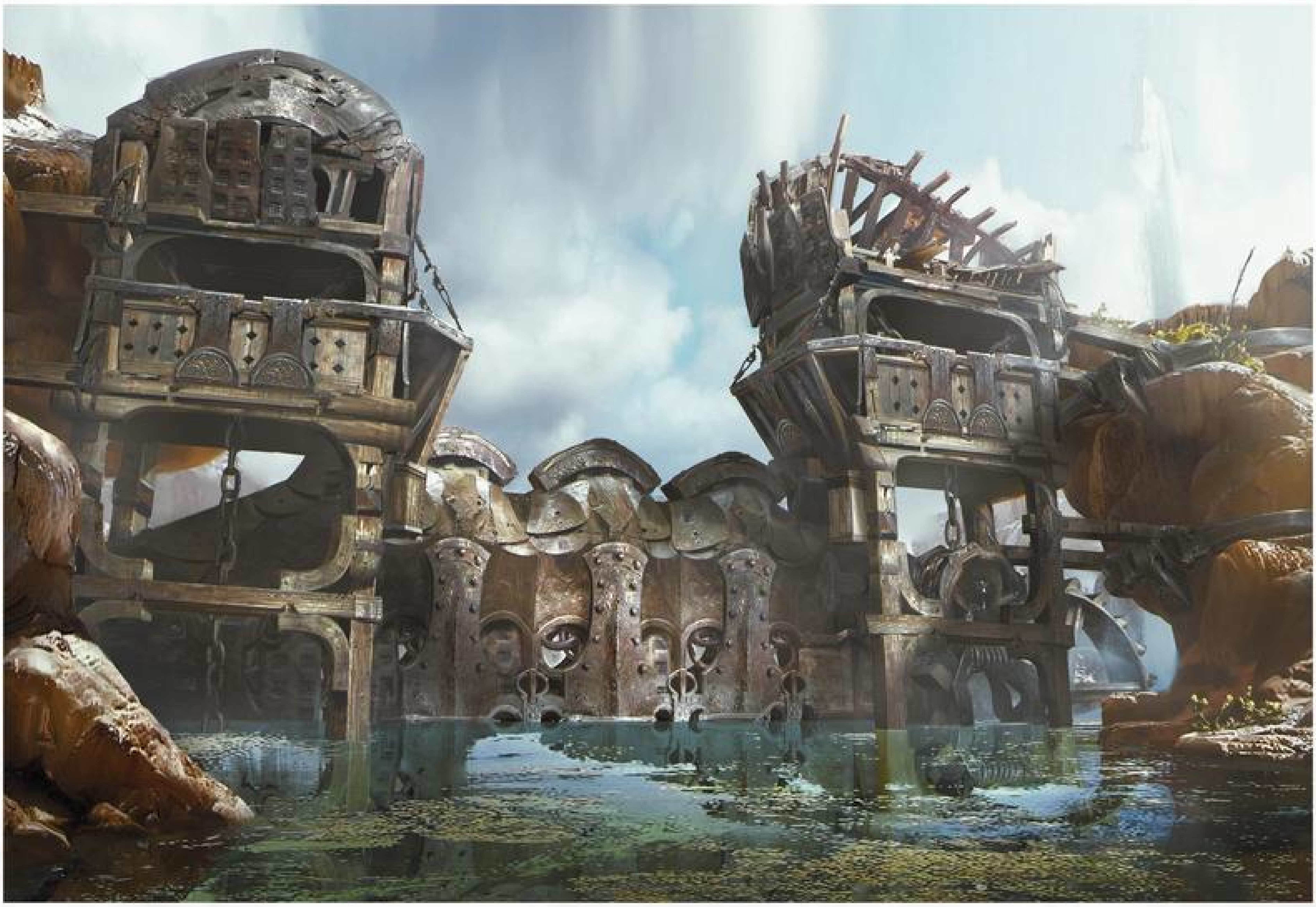
Designs for Svartalfheim's mining tools. Artist: Jessie Jiang



The fuller a fictional world is, the richer and more believable it becomes. To do that in *Ragnarök* the team pushed the set dressing further than ever before. These concepts show designs from artist Jessie Jiang, who researched mining equipment and tools to give her work authenticity. Her contributions made Svartalfheim feel lived in and historical, with its grain grinders, smelters, and ore-extraction tools.

Svartalfheim mining rig explorations. Artist: Abe Taraky

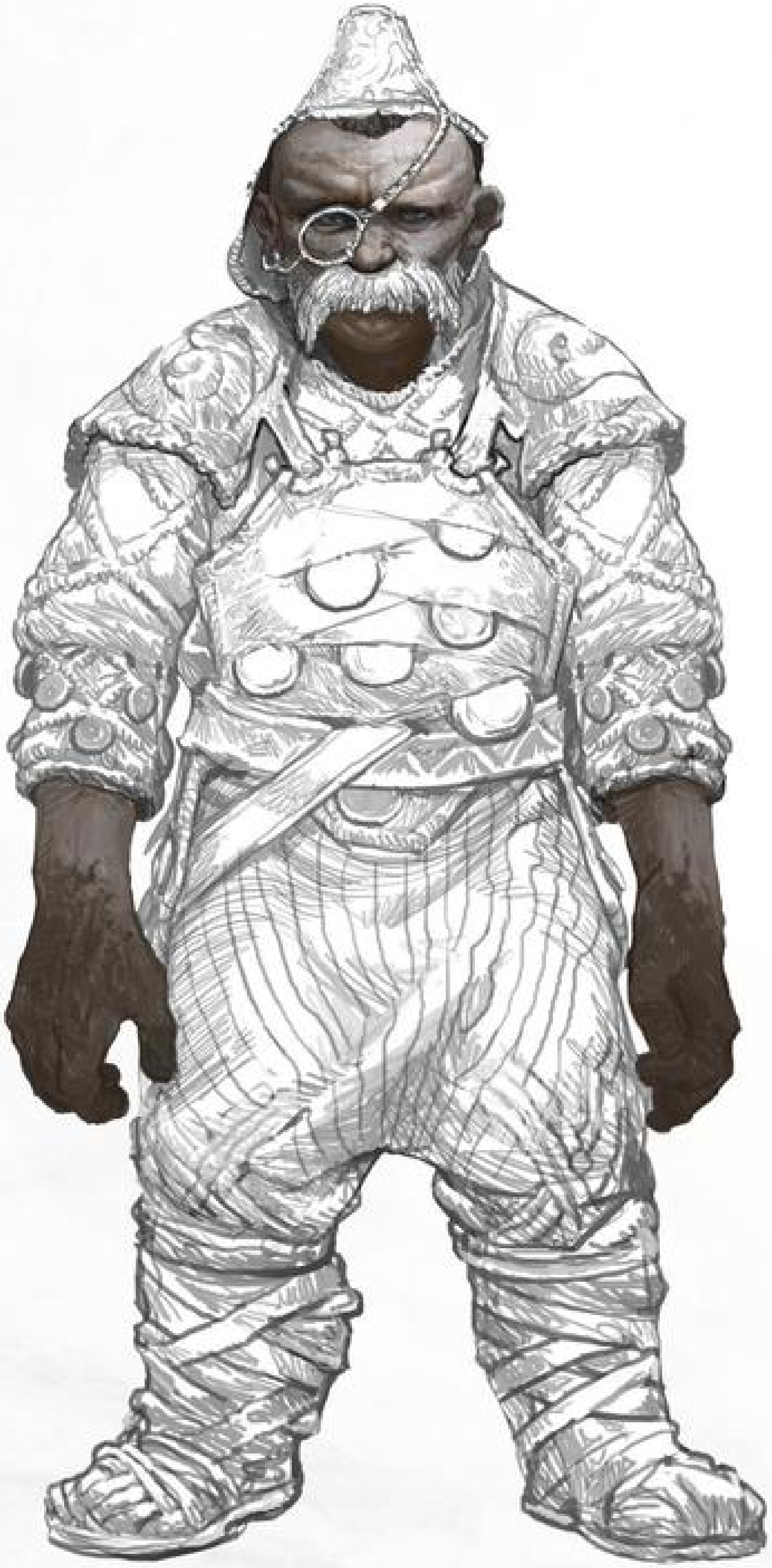


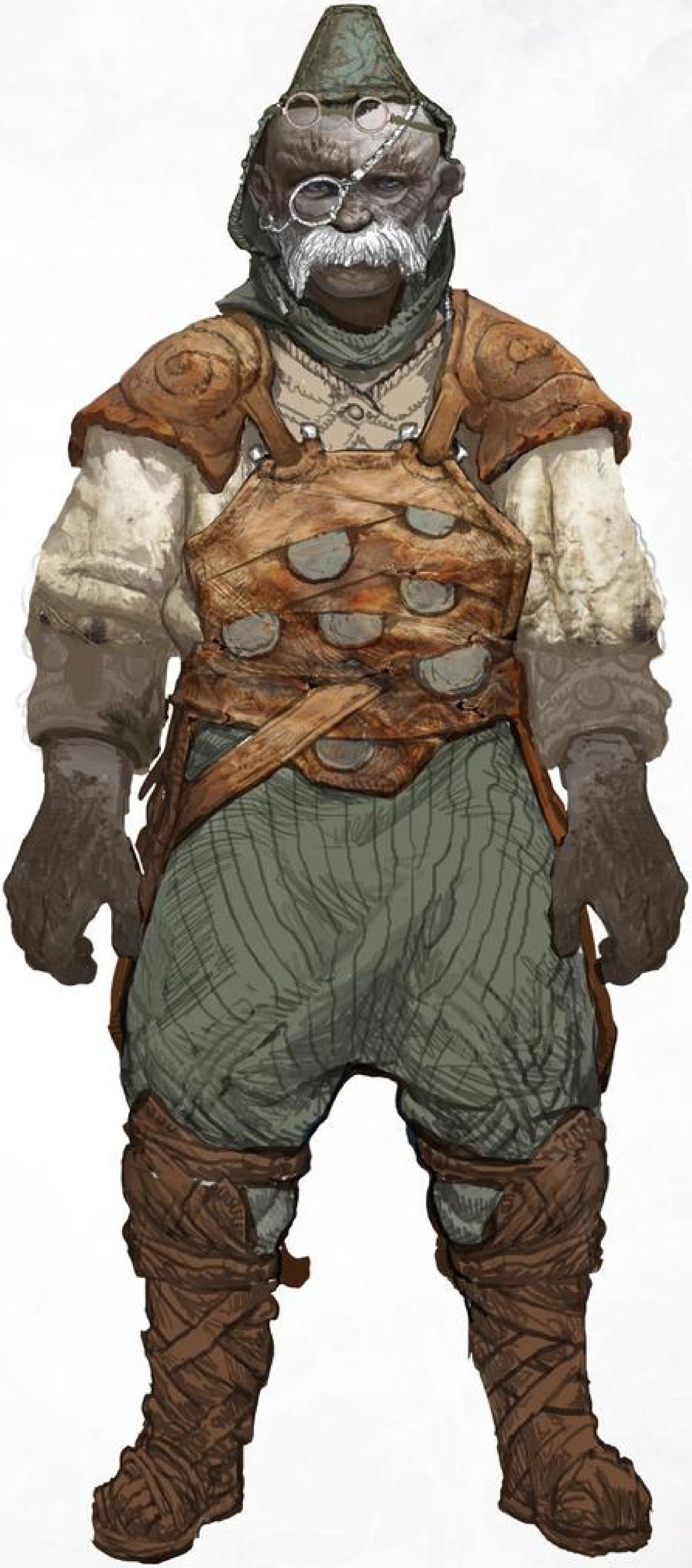


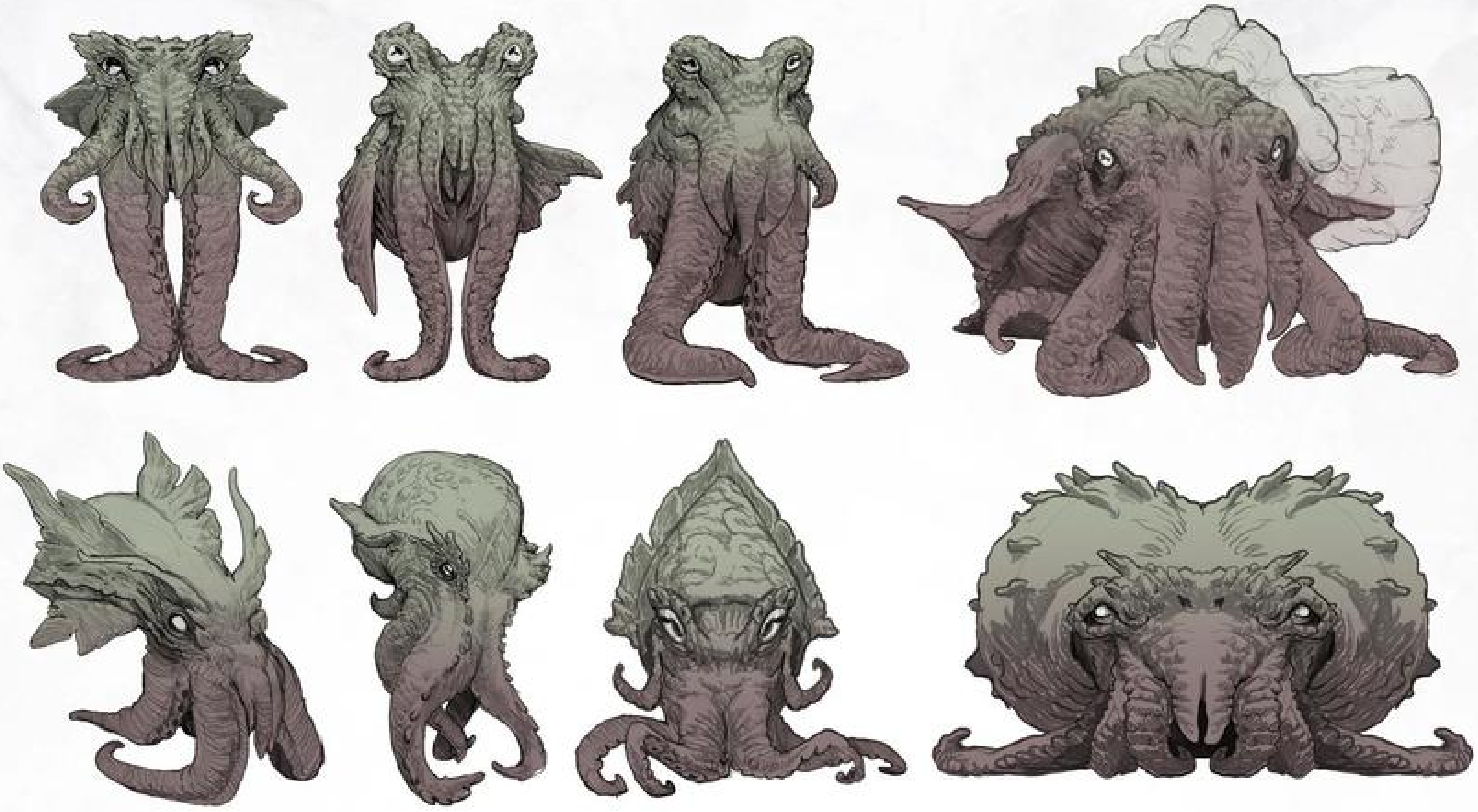
DURLIN

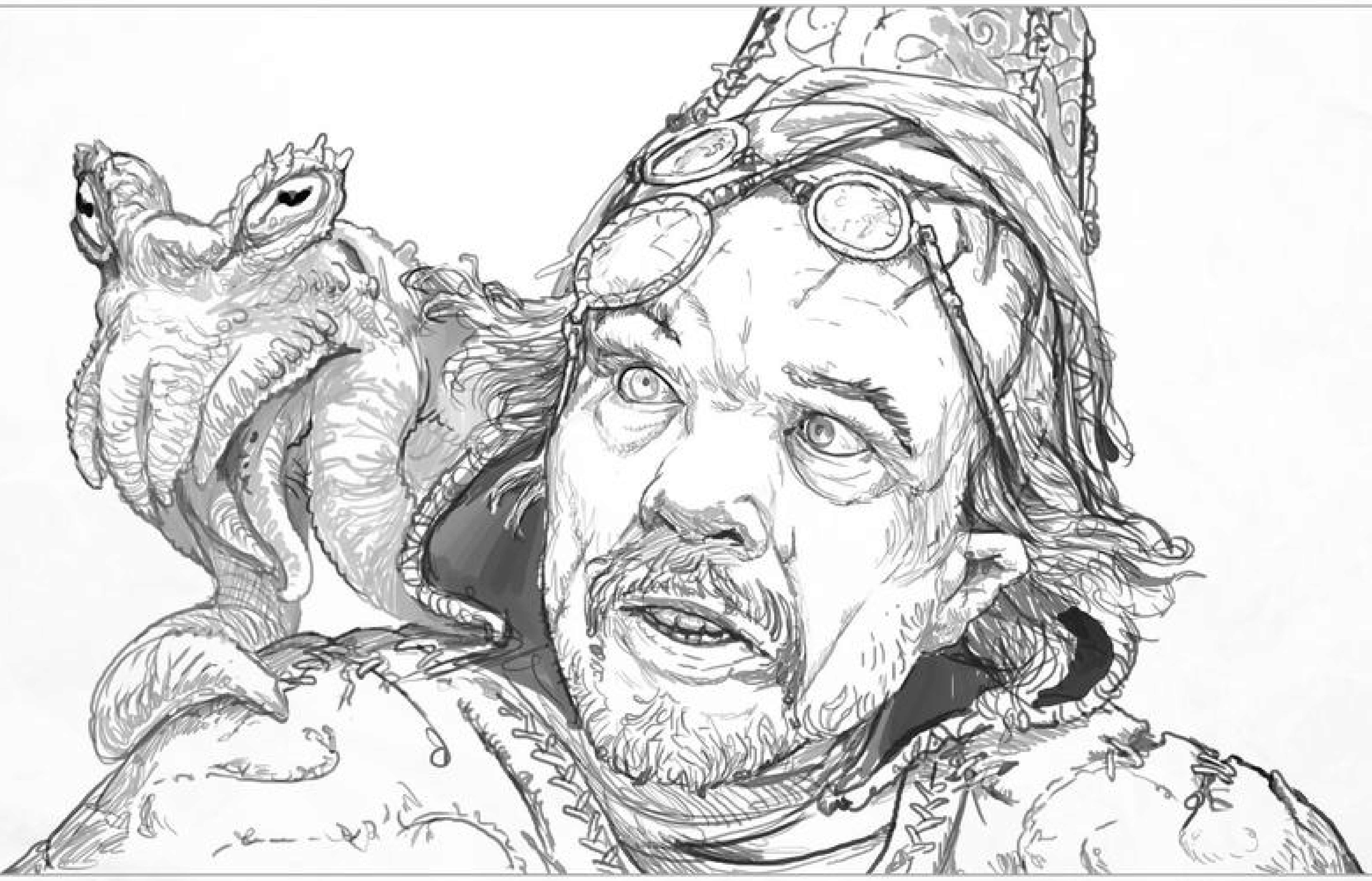
Though now affecting a humble appearance, Durlin once led a failed uprising against Odin. The artists wanted that heavy history to show on Durlin's face and in his eyes. "He was now to be a bookkeeper, tucked away and out of trouble, but bearing marks on his head for his part in the uprising," Oakley said. "We also played with ink. As his companion was a little creature originally known as a 'squidopus,' it may have been used for its ink, and at times it could be an uncooperative critter, leaving Durlin stained and dismayed."

Artist: Stephen Oakley







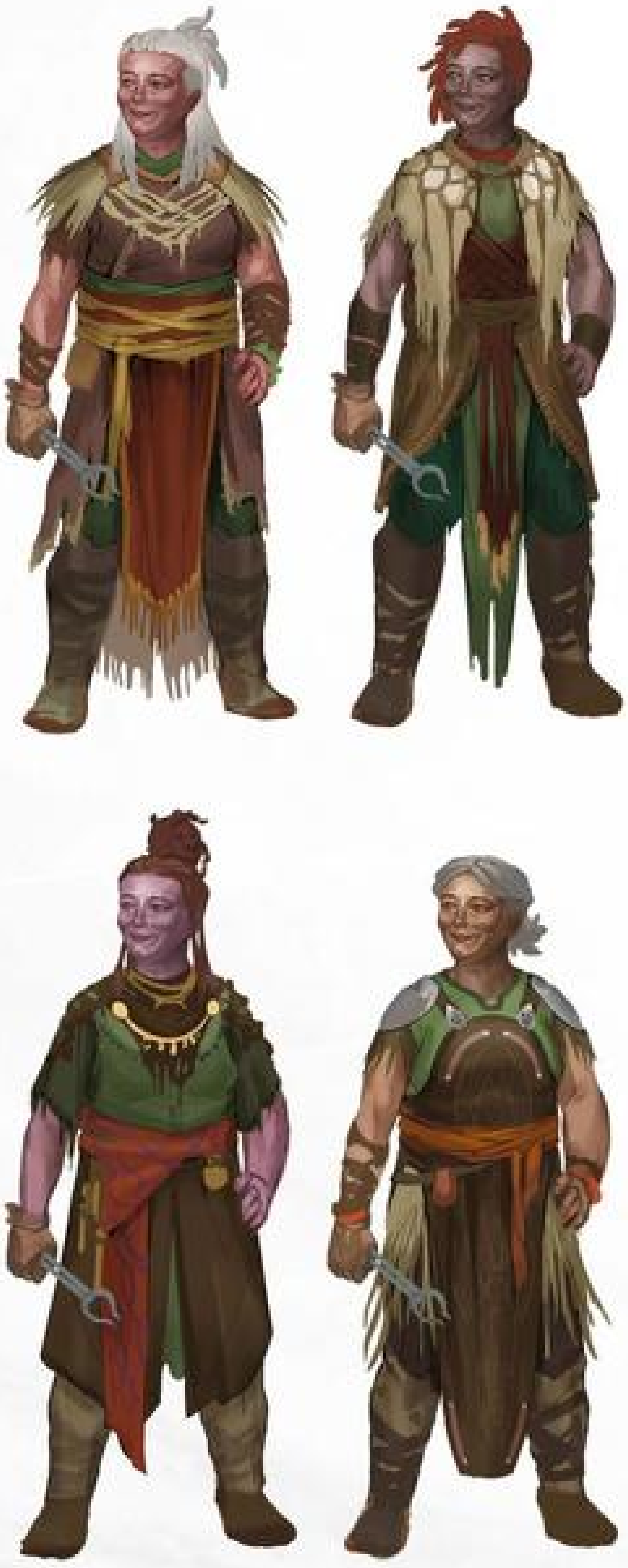


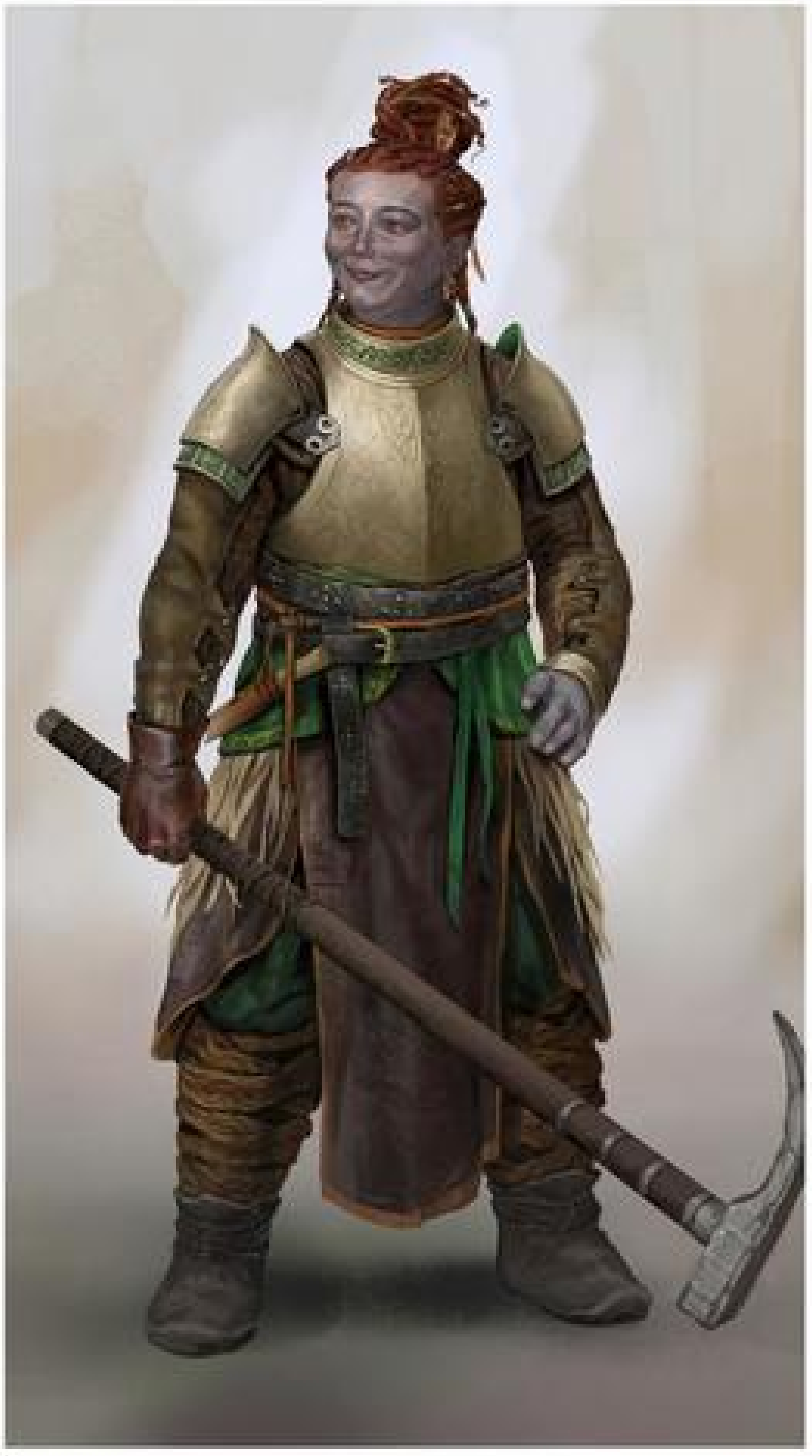
"The squidopus finally had a name given to it—Dínner—as that's what the bugger may have become if Durlin had not grown so attached to it. Dínner was an effort to make a pet like its owner, outwardly grumpy and a little questionable—pulling again from nature's oceanic grump, the octopus—but with some of the shape language of a cuttlefish early on. A combo that made you question if you wanted to interact with it at all," Oakley said.

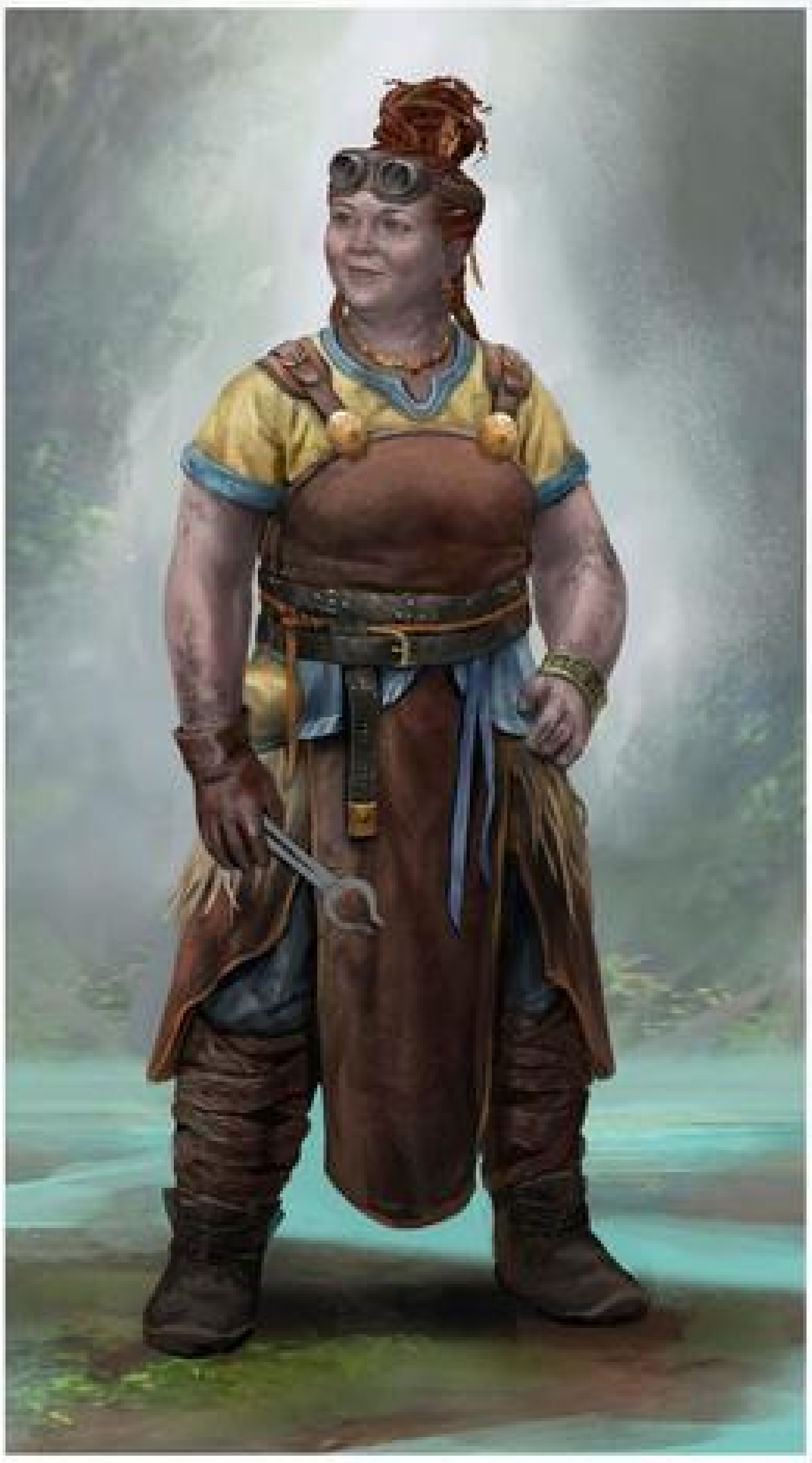
LUNDA

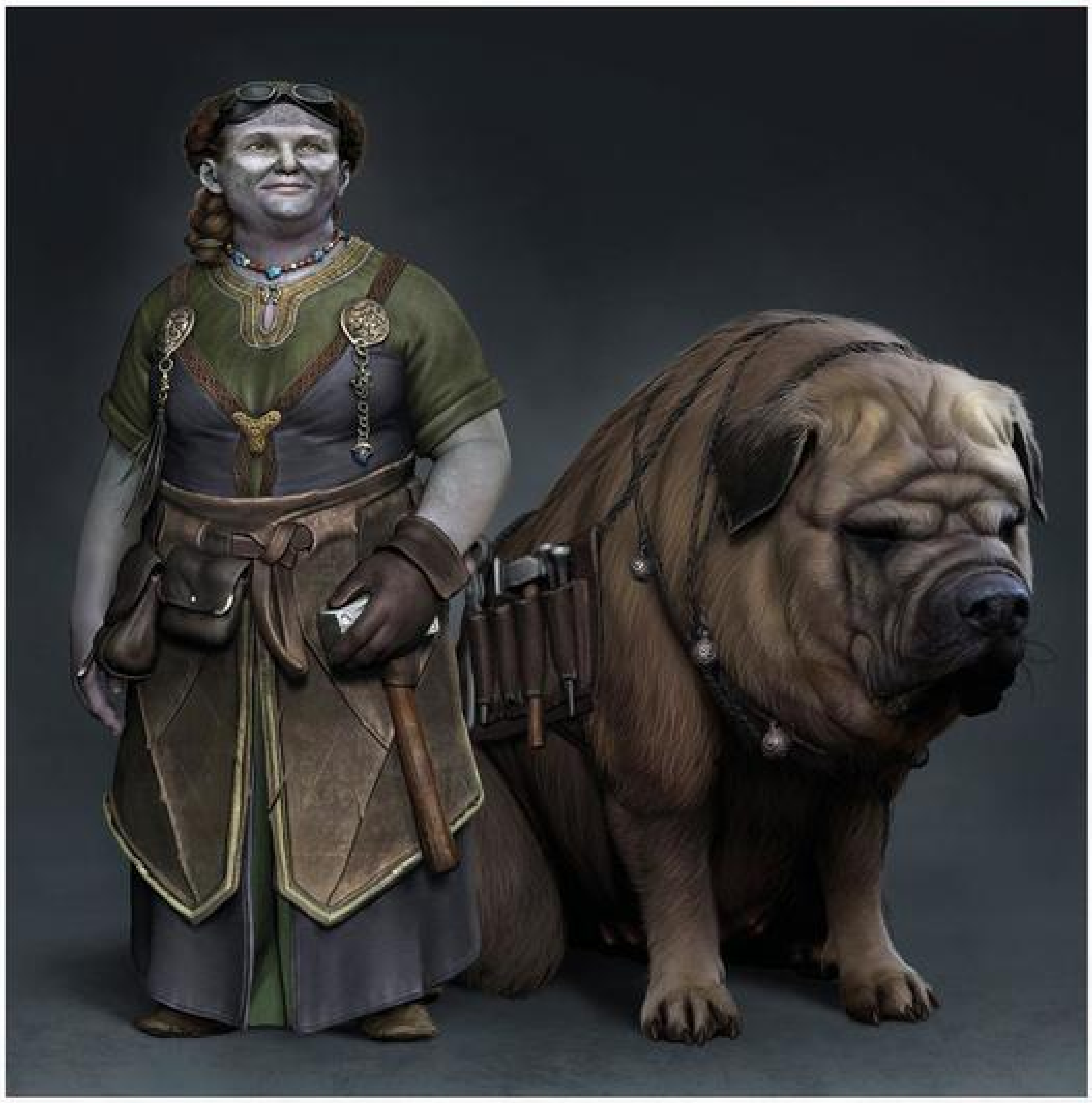
As Lunda was the first female Dwarf the team designed, finding the right look took some extra work. Because they knew her personality was optimistic and bubbly, they gave her rounder facial features and a warm smile to evoke a friendly aura.

"Early on, we didn't know if she had any combat gear or weaponry, so I thought it'd be fun to see her with a giant war hammer that's as big as she is and have her swing it and bash enemies," Kligerman said. "Later, we were told she was purely a blacksmith, so we went for more of a mechanic look with a thick leather apron and fully equipped tool belt, along with some fun goggles and ash and dirt on her face from working the forge."

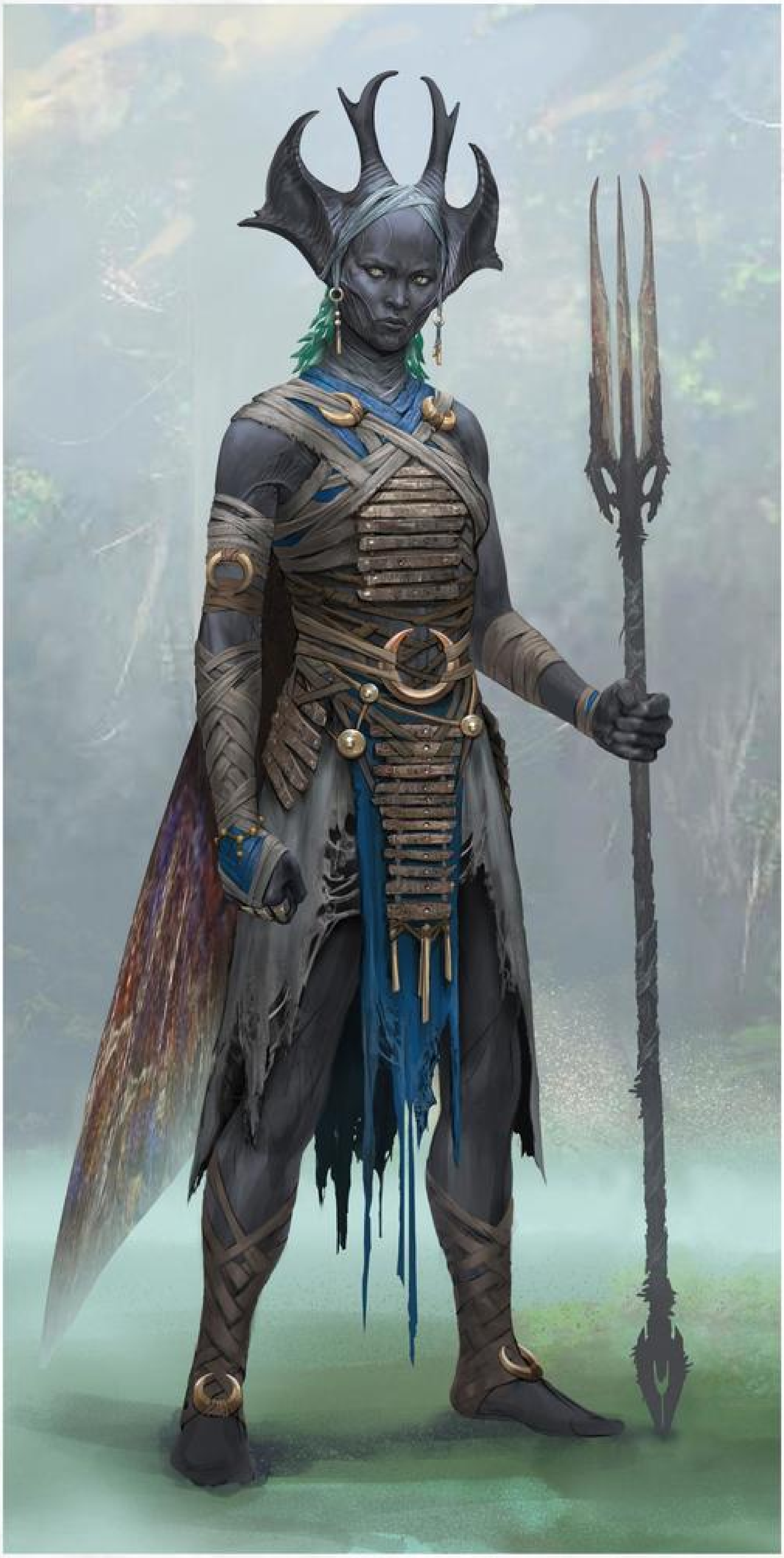








Lunda and her pet. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (left and top); Rafael Grassetti (bottom right)

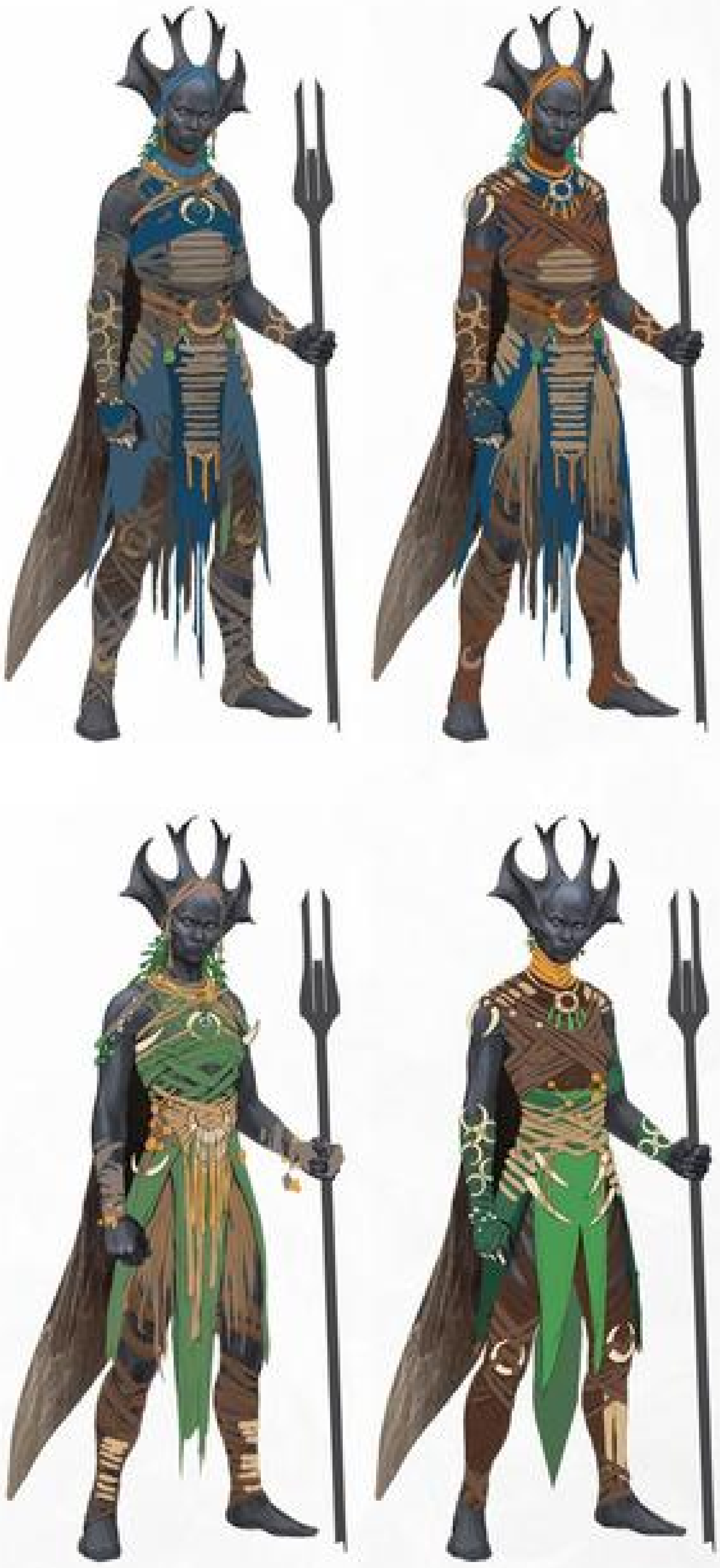


Experimenting with color palettes for Beyla. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

BEYLA

Beyla is stoic, loyal, and an extremely skilled fighter. As such, the team wanted her design to reflect that more serious personality. Yefim Kligerman started the exploration of the character with her portrait. He wanted to give Beyla a fierce expression and a stance that communicates her readiness for combat. Kligerman wanted Beyla to carry herself in such a way that one only has to glance at the character to know she's more than capable of handling herself in a fight.

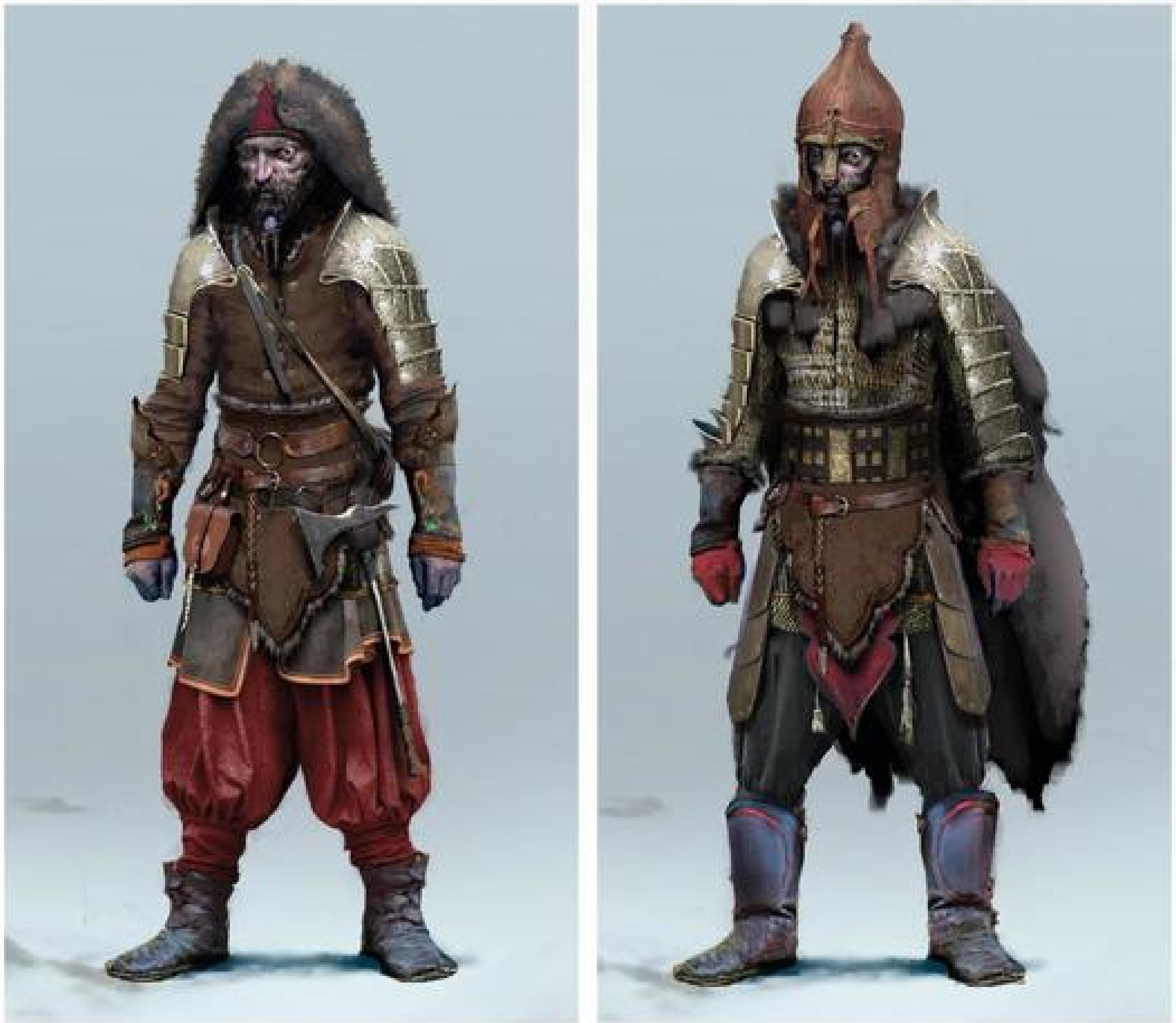
Additionally, Kligerman used Beyla's Vanaheimian origins to bring elements from the realm to her costume. He said, "It was a fun opportunity to add some leaves and pops of color specific to this realm."

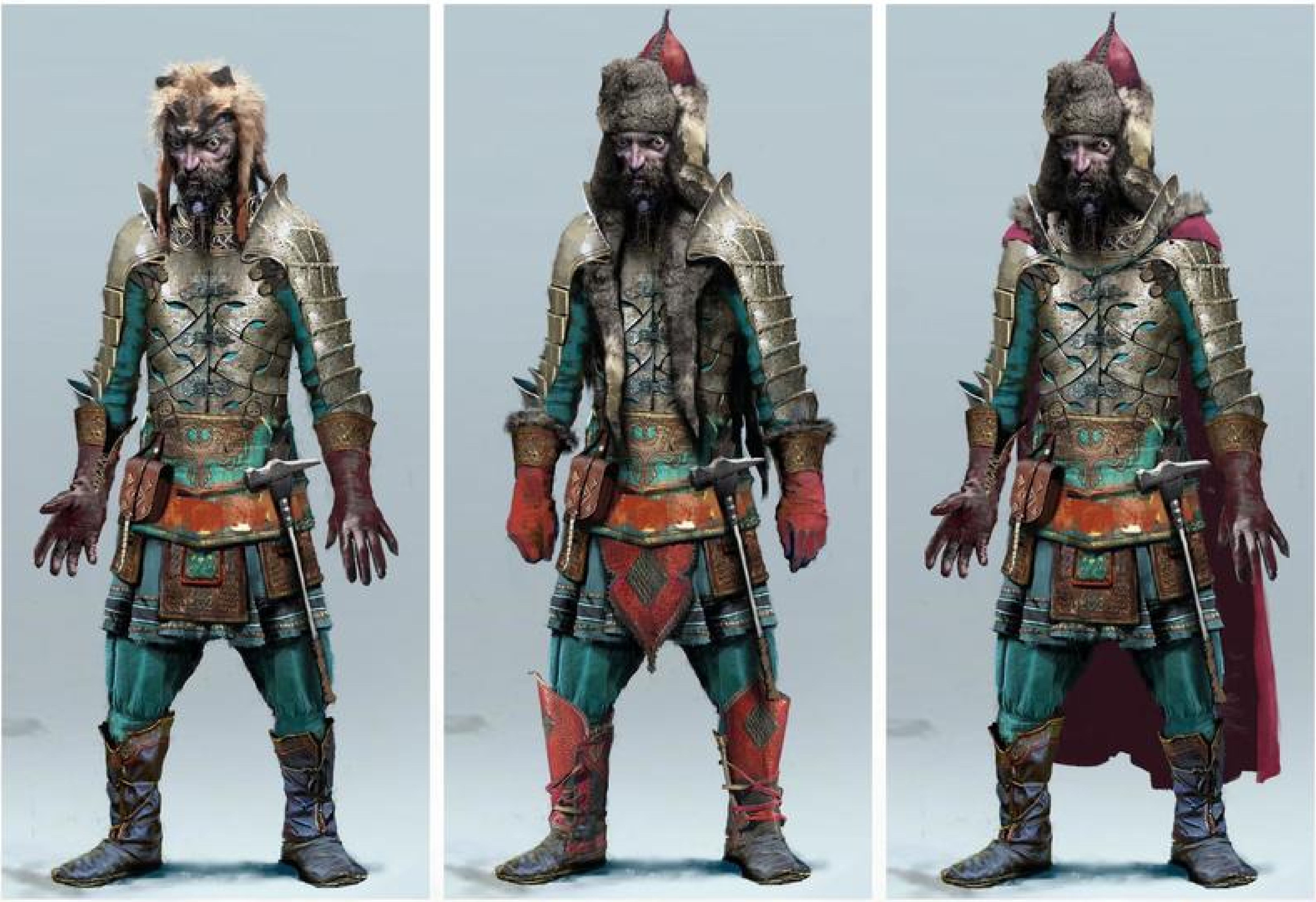


BROK & SINDRI

The Huldra brothers return, continuing the design challenge of combining historical elements with high fantasy and mythological components to achieve each of their looks. Cabrera said, "They were the perfect chance to bring in less widely known Viking cultural references that are less Nordic and more Eastern. Even pulling inspiration from the periphery of the Viking lands, like Rus Vikings, and further east to include richer color palettes and extravagant shapes."

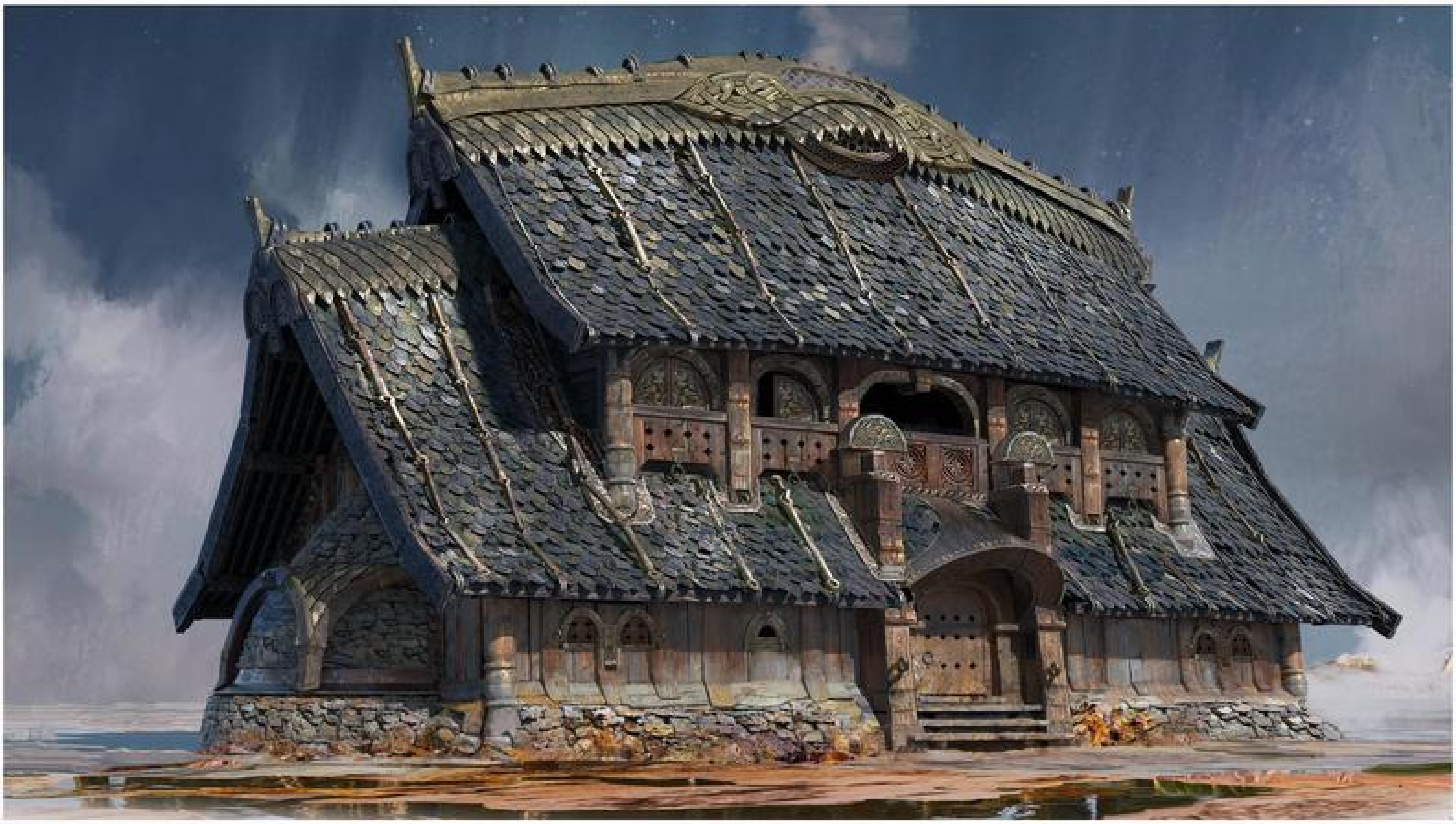
He continued, "As master smiths, they have a love for the excellent craftsmanship and the refined value of weapons and the best metals. We wanted to combine all of that with furs and the proper clothing to face the final and greatest winter of all time, Fimbulwinter."

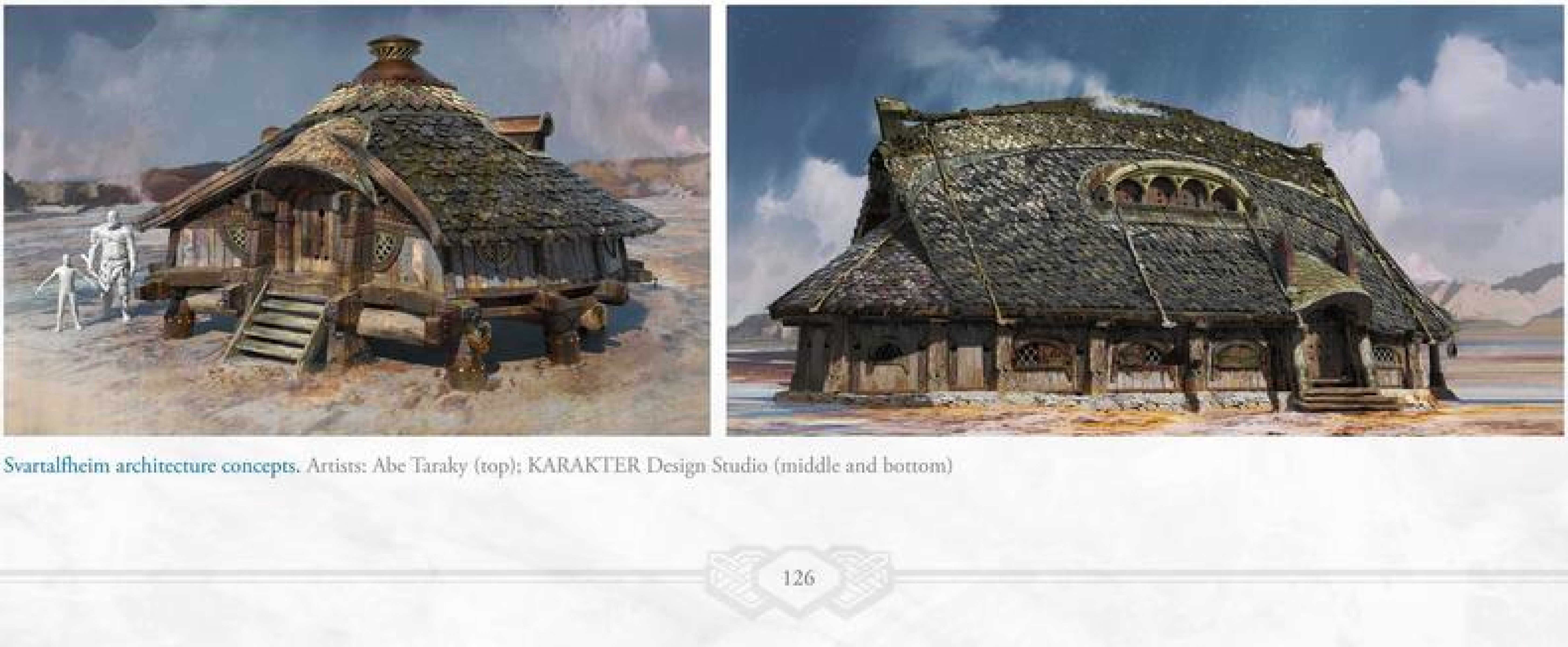




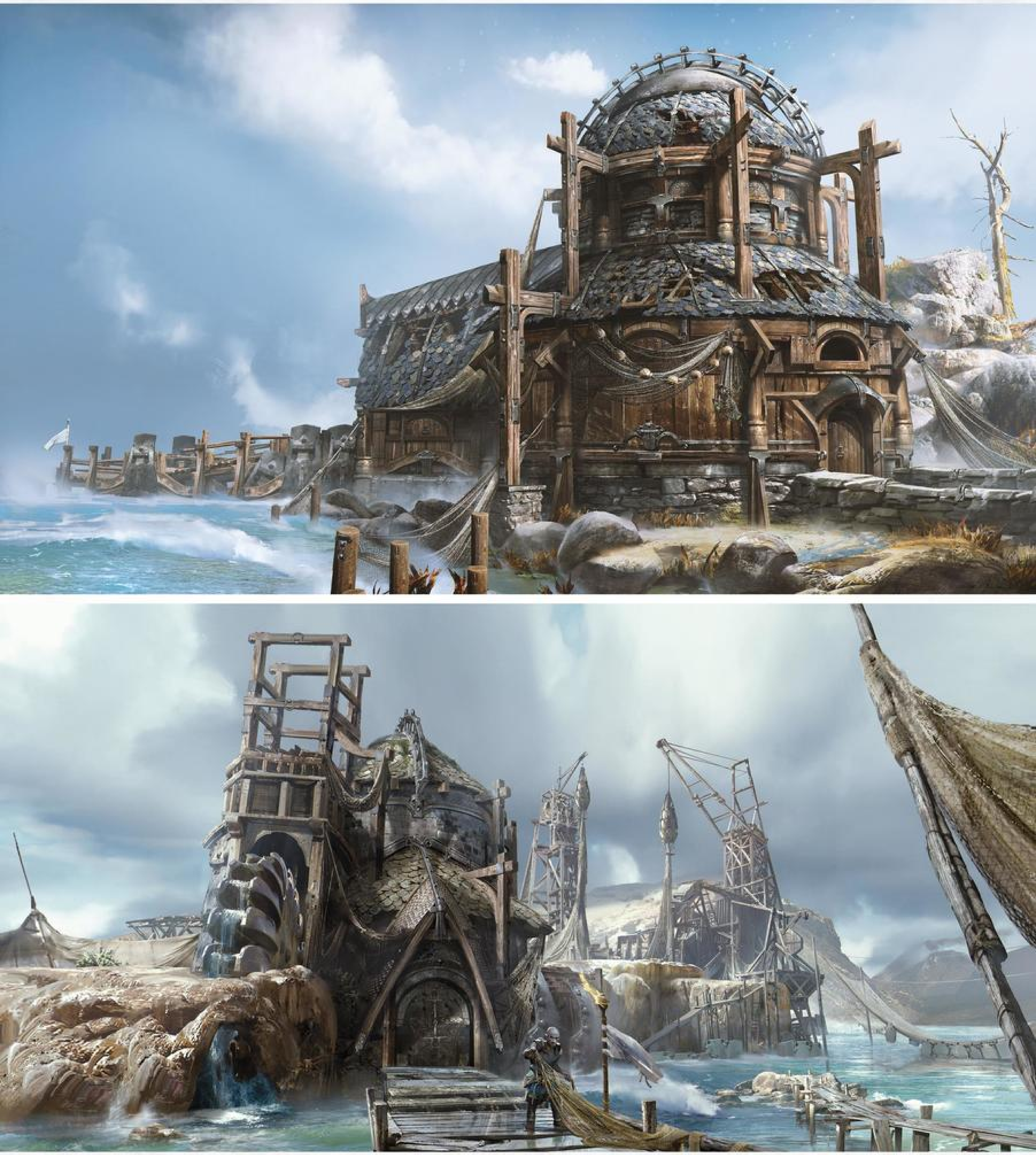
Dressing Brok and Sindri for Fimbulwinter. Artist: José Cabrera

Artists continued to experiment with incorporating an armored metallic look on Svartalfheim's structures. With the heavily iterative design process at the studio, early concepts become more and more refined with each pass. These final results of the Svartalfheim architecture show an expression of Norse design and classic fantasy that feels intrinsic to the *God of War* universe. The details in the carvings, the consistent bowing of the wood, the use of shared materials—all of it is of the cohesive visual language for Svartalfheim.





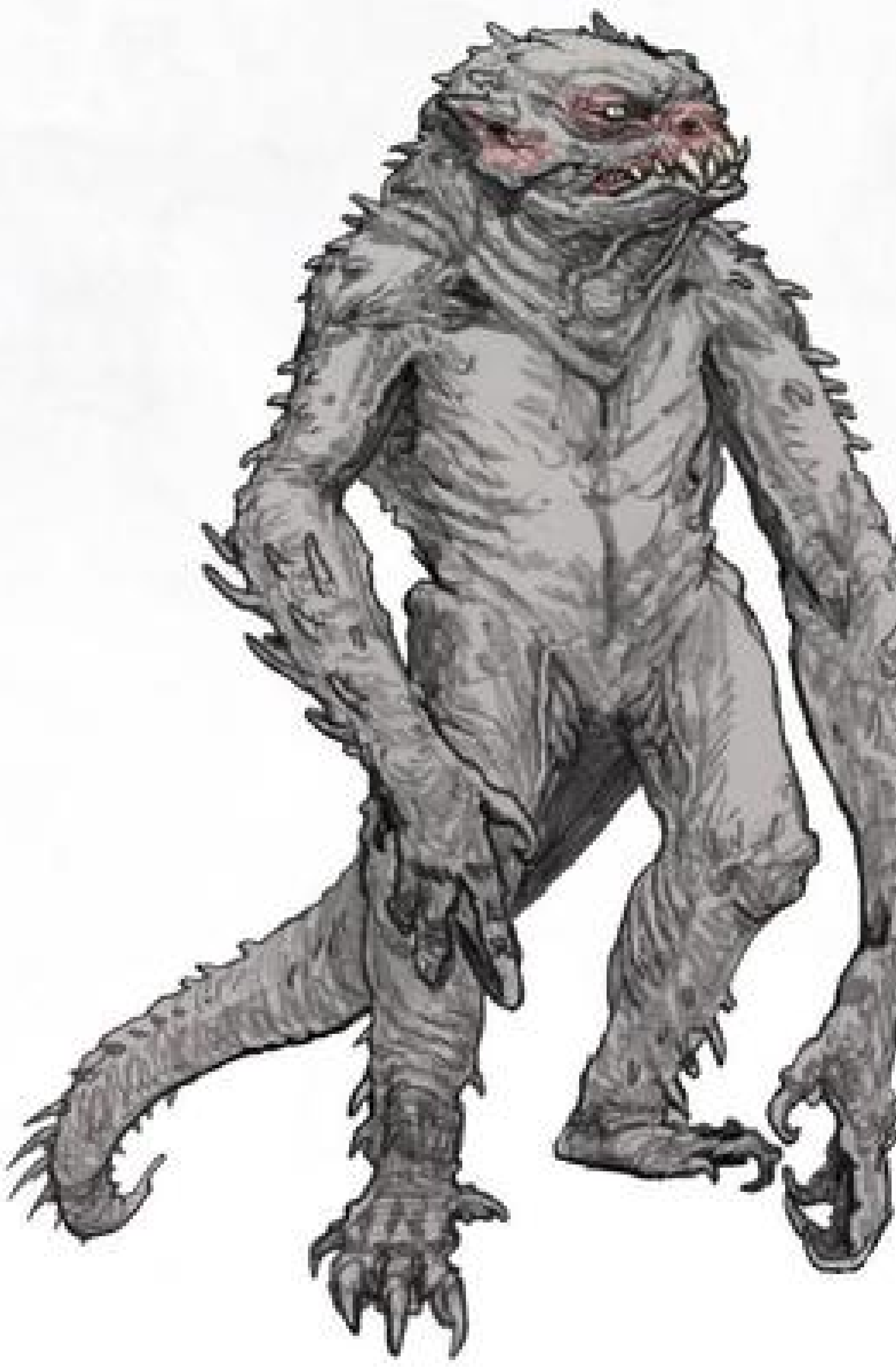
Svartalfheim architecture concepts. Artists: Abe Taraky (top); KARAKTER Design Studio (middle and bottom)

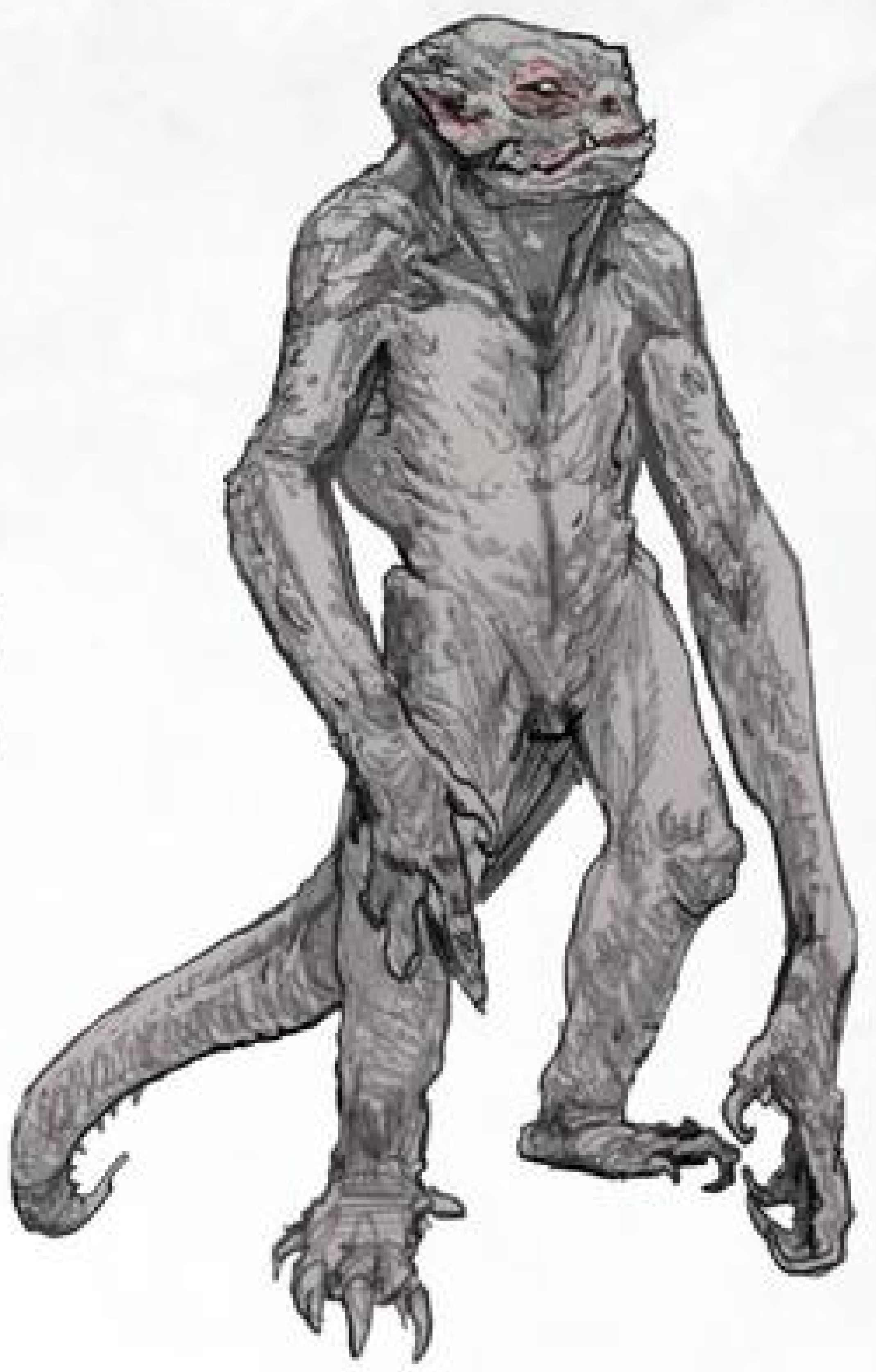


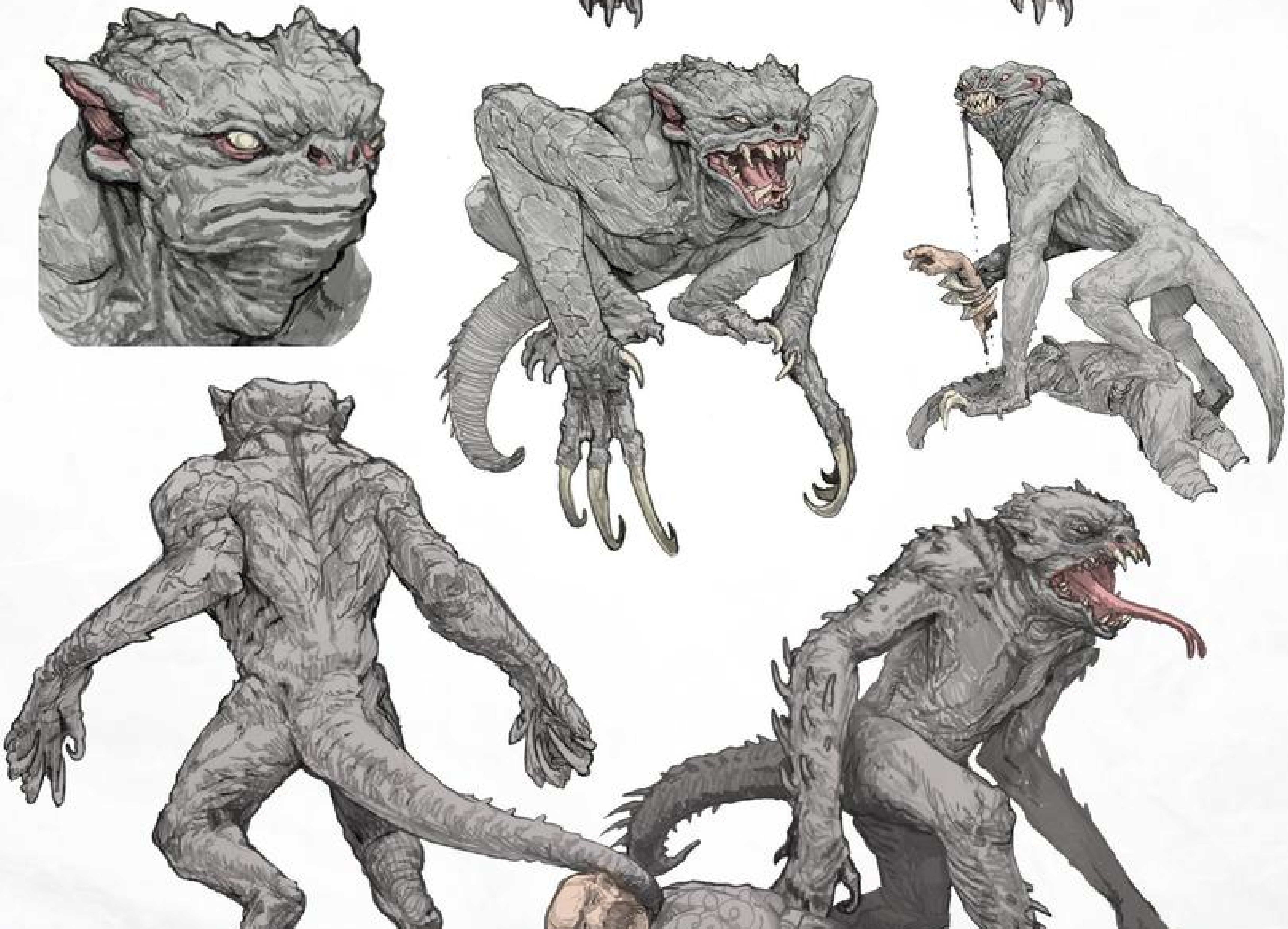
Dwarven structures. Artist: Abe Taraky

"The cave dwellers were our attempt to bring something to dwell in the dark, dank parts of the nine realms," Oakley said. "The first realm we would see them in, Svartalfheim, largely shaped what they would become. As Svartalfheim was a large stony bayou, the idea of cave salamanders, bats, and frogs started to shape this beast. They varied from more lean and silly creatures to the more meaty and fierce entities, taking examples from classic gargoyle statues and goblins. These creatures presented a challenge in the sheer number of types we wanted to combine while still allowing for them to be distinct enough for combat and looking like they should be a threat to the hardy Dwarves and Elves they would be hunting—as well as Kratos himself."

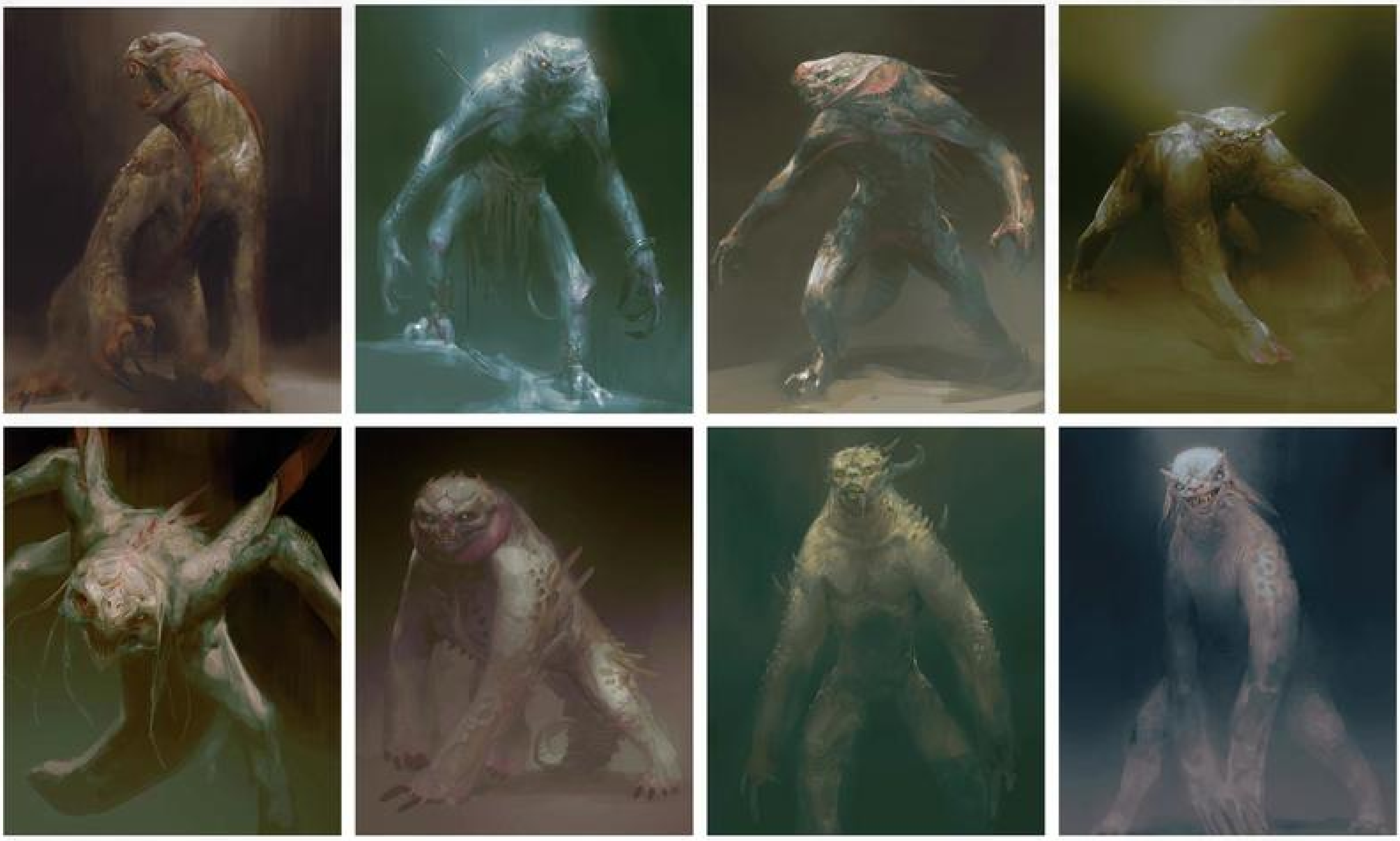
Artist: Stephen Oakley

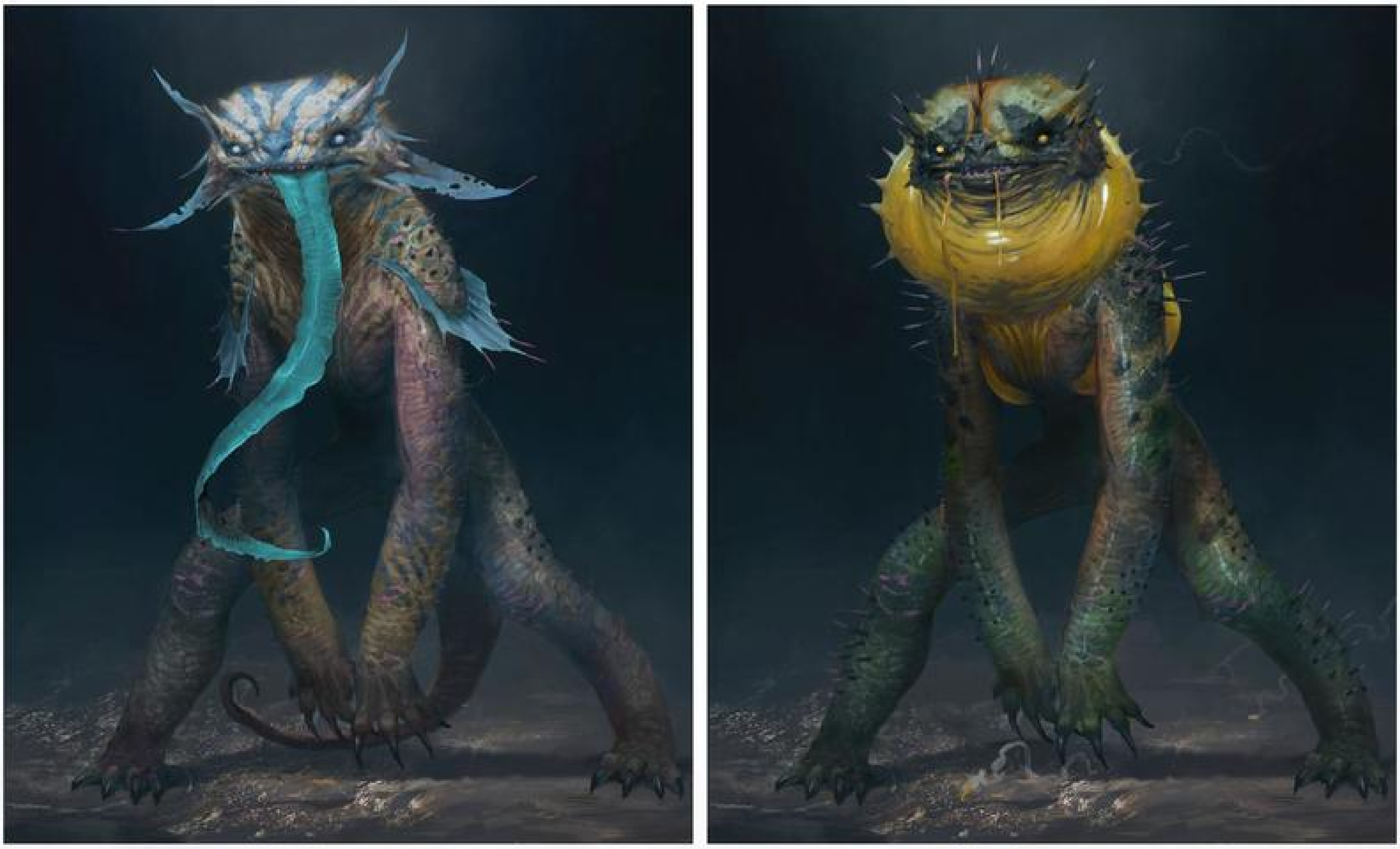






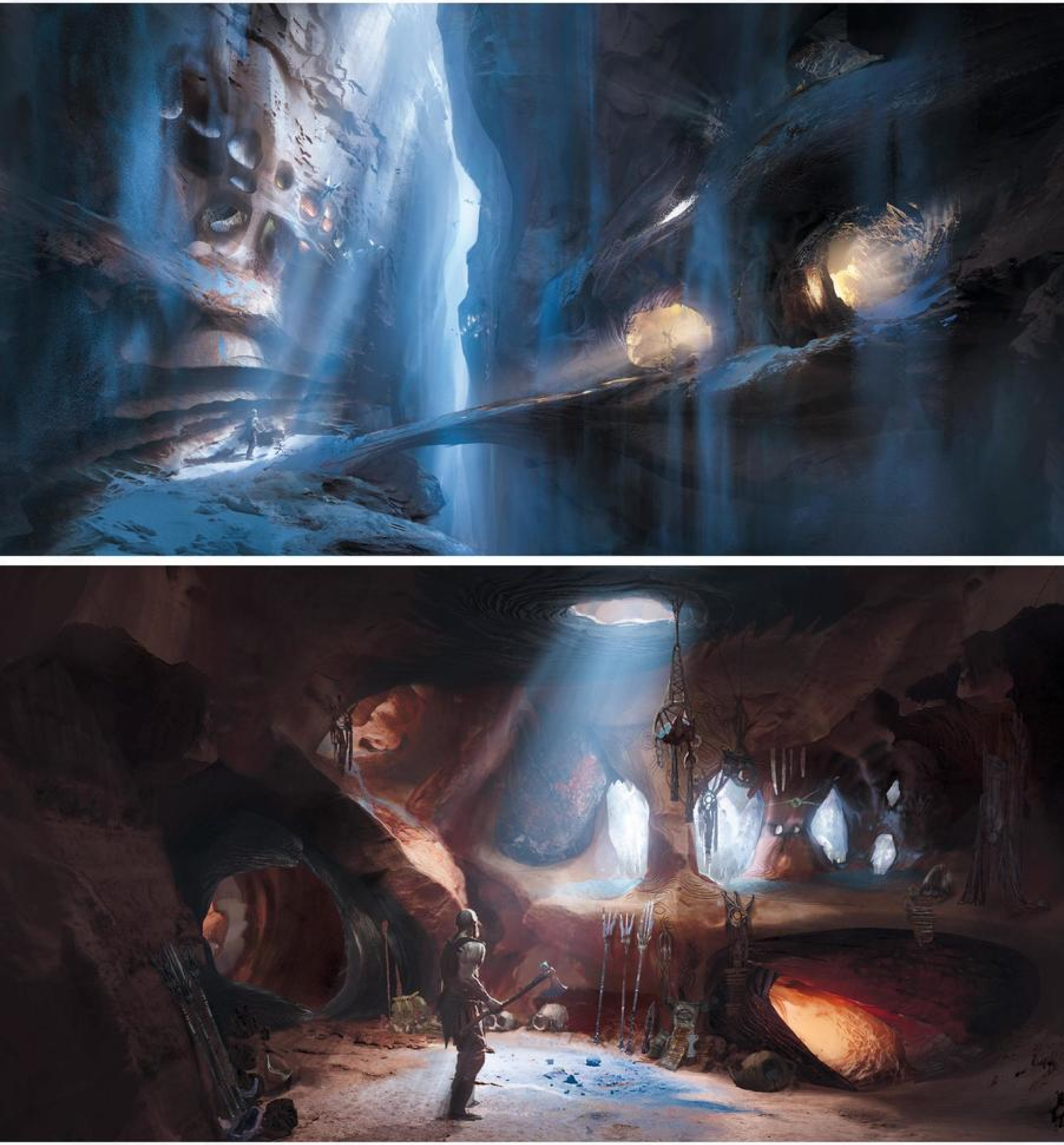
Cave dweller shape explorations. Artist: Bjorn Hurri (Opus Artz)





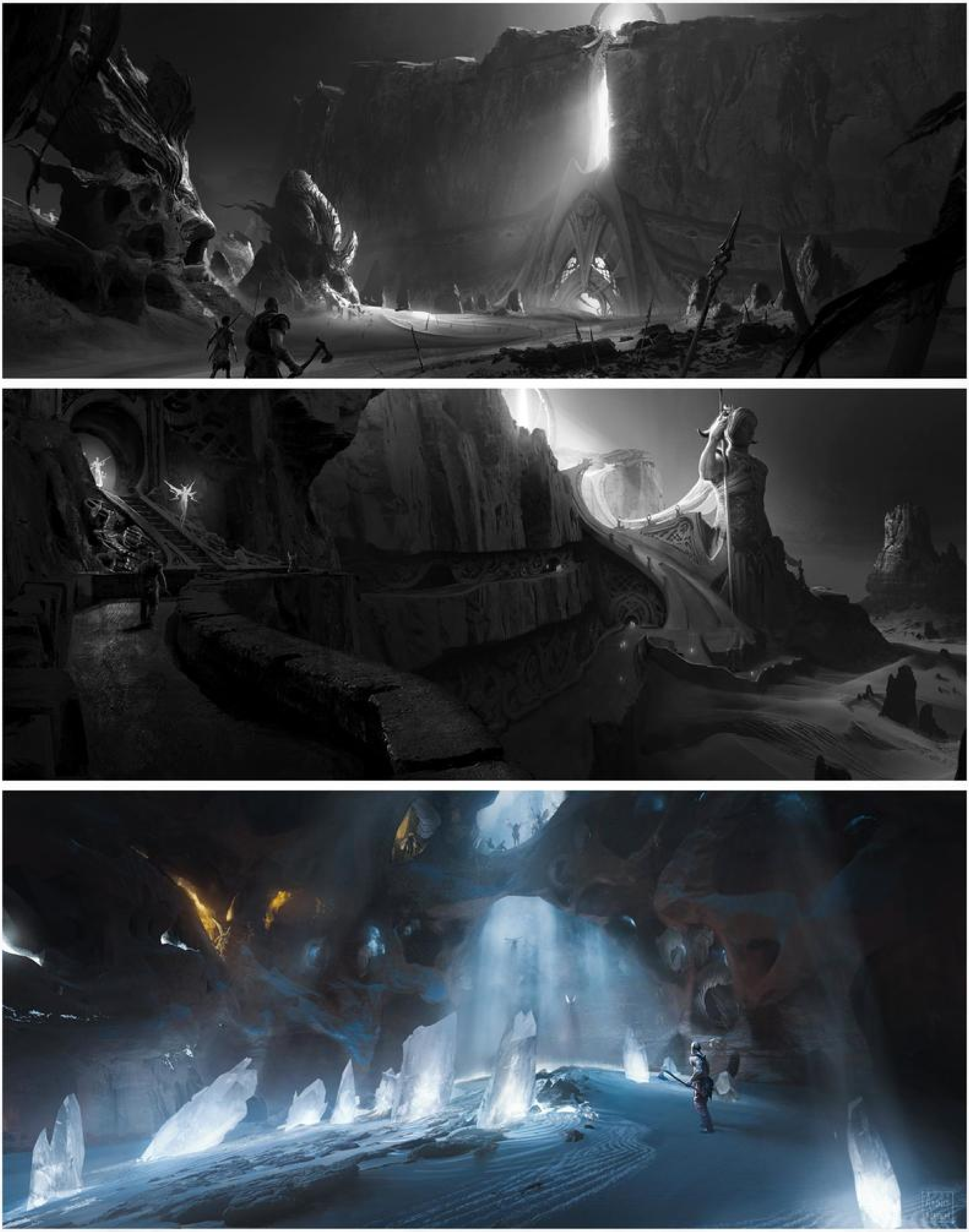
A new creature to design meant digging into different iterations and experimenting with proportions, hues, and protuberances. The artists see what kind of variety they can envision and put on the page. This set of cave dwellers was completed by artist Bjorn Hurri, who presented a range of options for the amphibian-like creatures. The above concepts show elements of the final "lasher" and "spitter" taking shape.

Lighting concepts for Alfheim. Artist: Annis Naeem

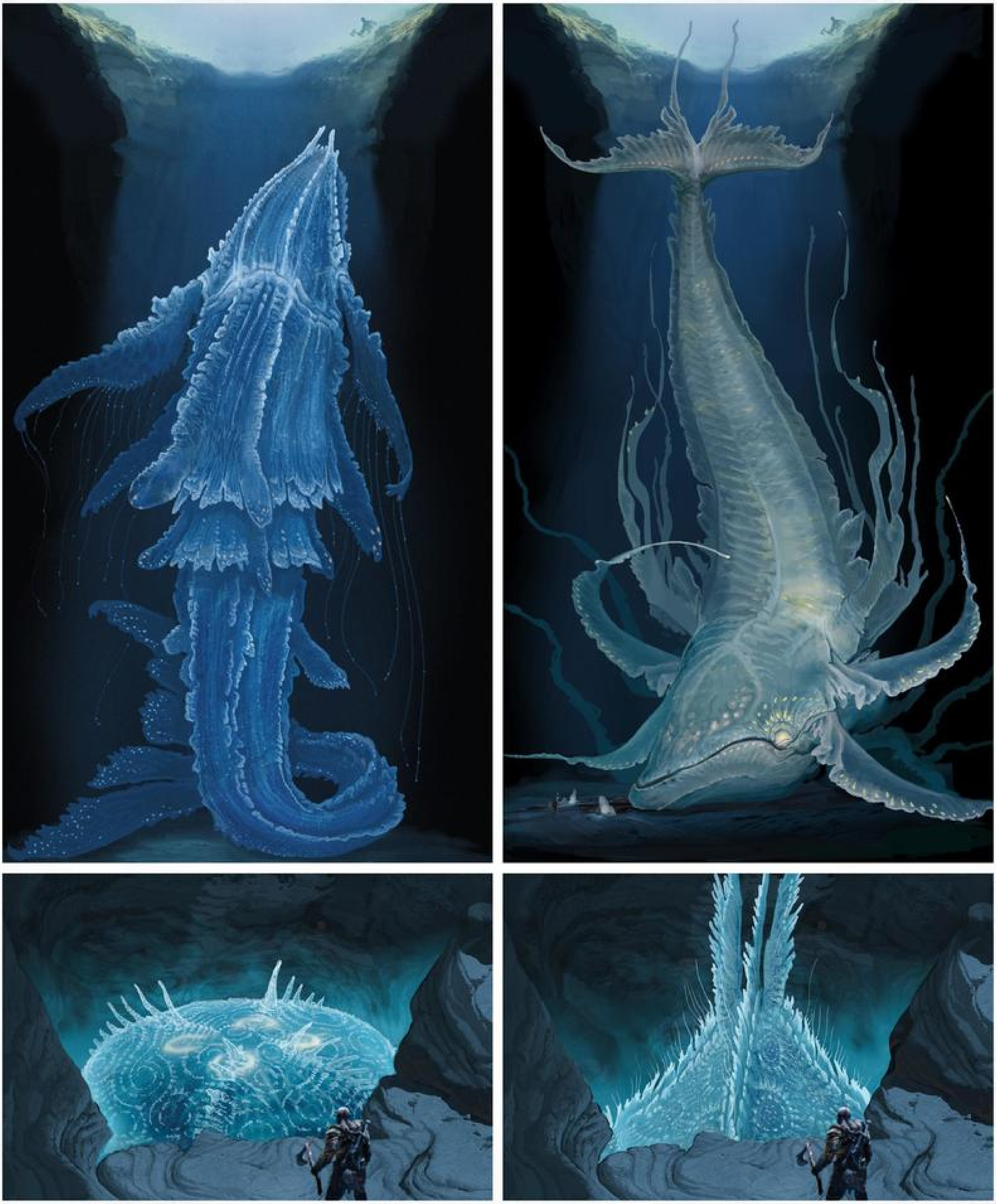


The previous game's foray into Alfheim centered on the Lake of Light and Freyr's Temple. Returning to the realm opened the door to visiting corners with diverse terrain and settings. In these concepts, artist Annis Naeem explored possible passages and tunnels in Alfheim with smooth, rounded surfaces.

Remnants of Alfheim's past. Artists: Mark Castanon (top and middle); Annis Naeem (bottom)

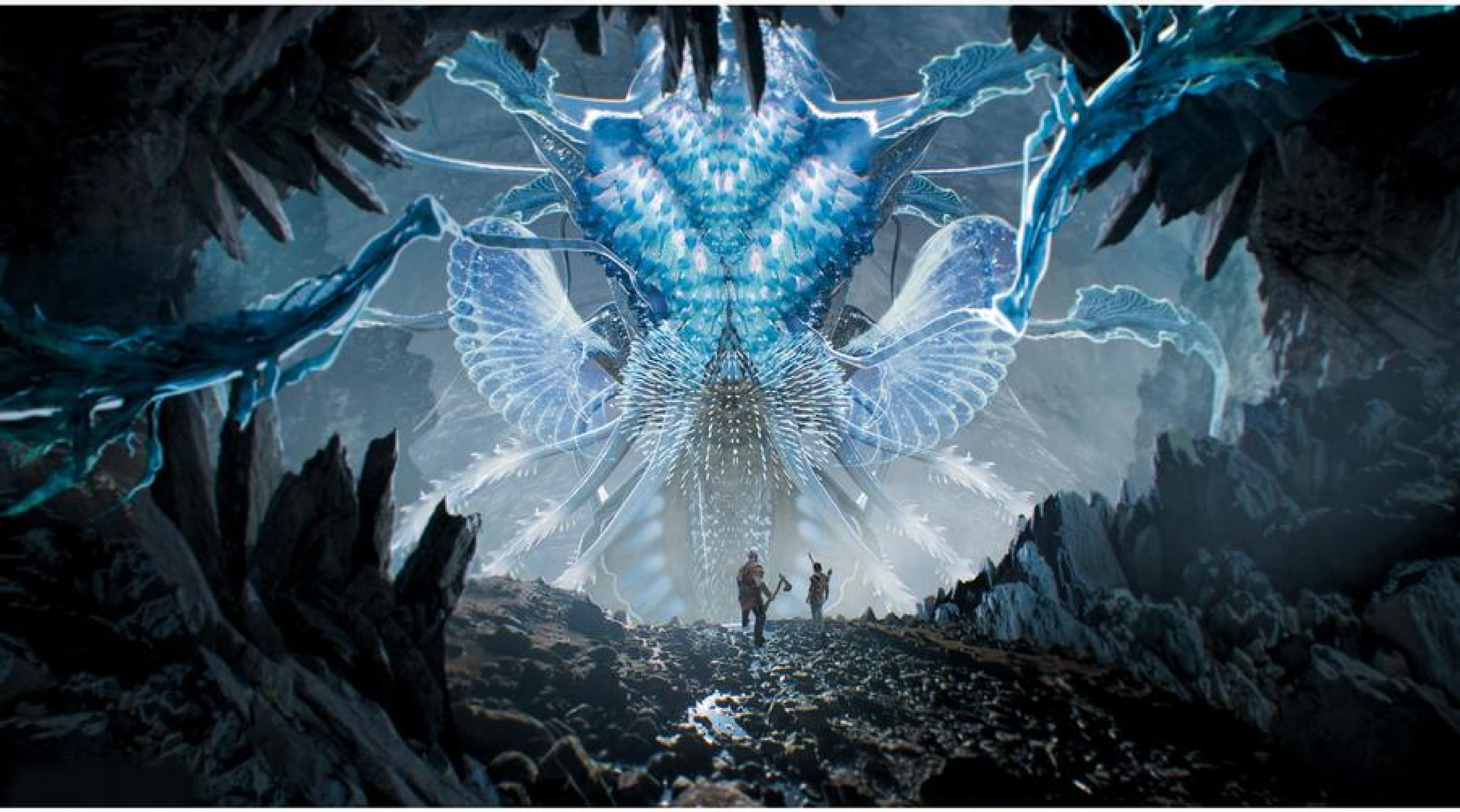


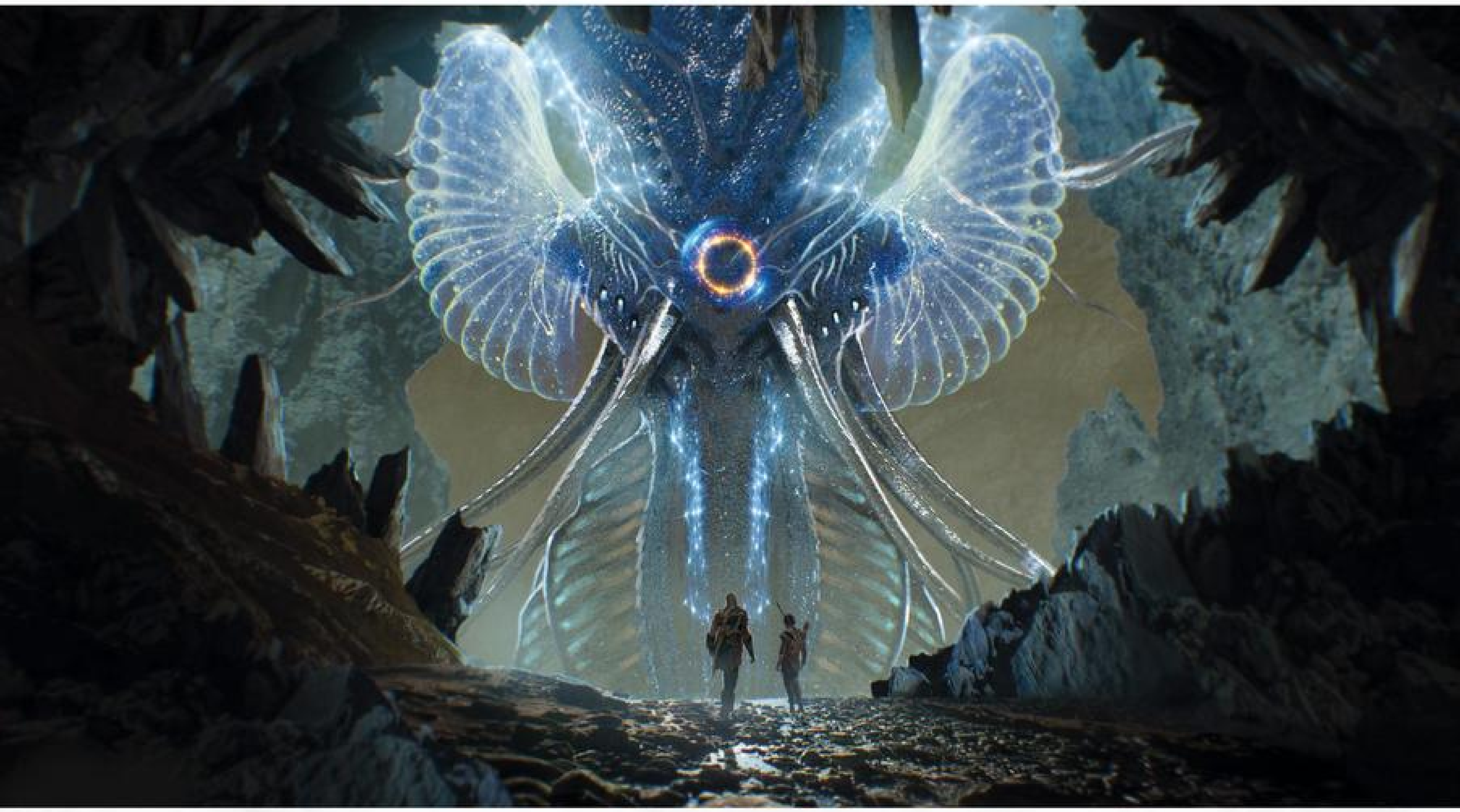
Establishing the scale of the Hafgufa. Artist: Stephen Oakley



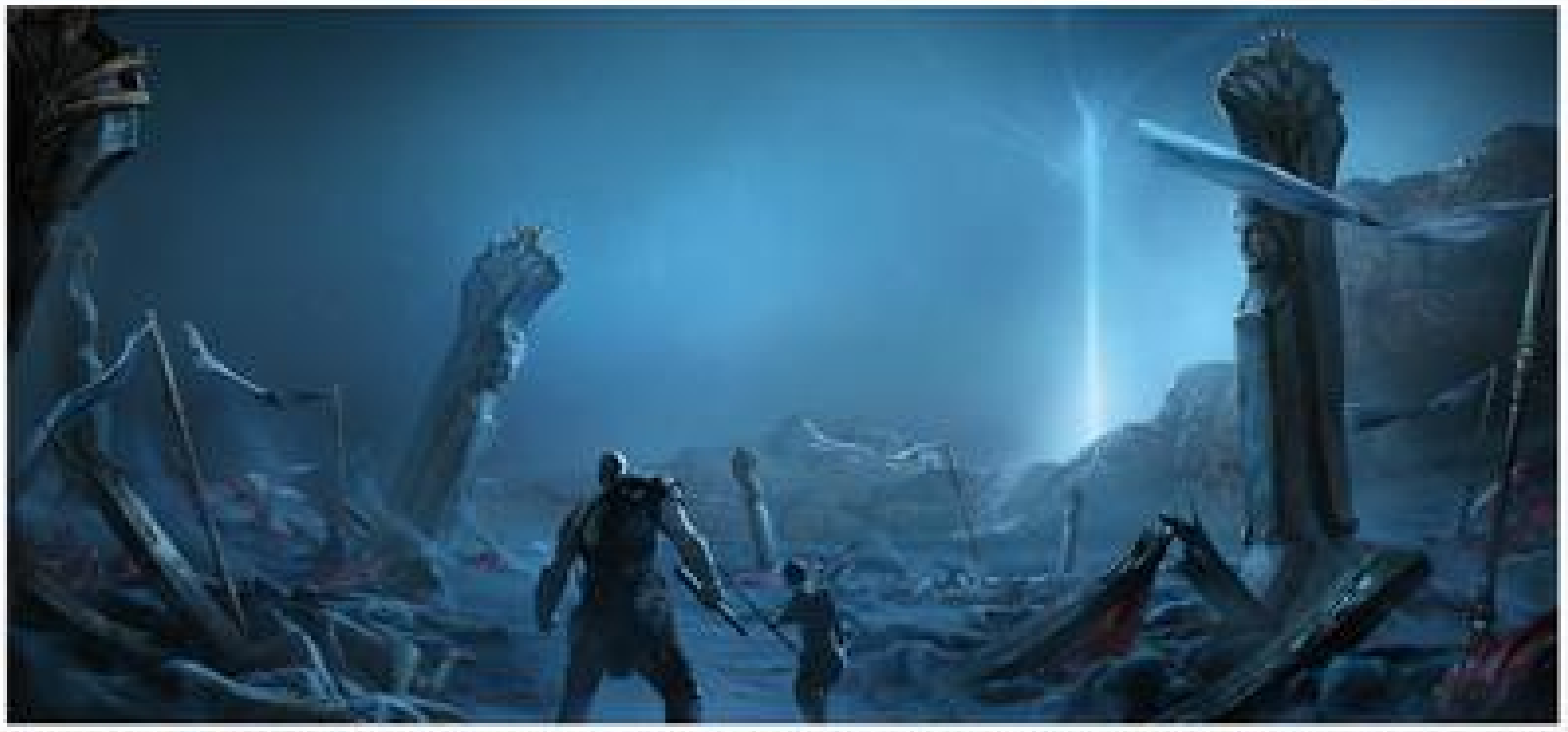
"The Hafgufa was an enormous entity that was originally to create the sandstorms in Alfheim," Oakley said. "We ended up pushing for aquatic themes in the dune seas and pulled from our own oceans as a starting point. As beautiful and mysterious as the Elves were, we wanted to capture the same spirit in this entity, so jellyfish and the deep-sea creatures really helped us push this beast into a unique direction."

Bioluminescence and iridescence explorations. Artist: Karl Lindberg



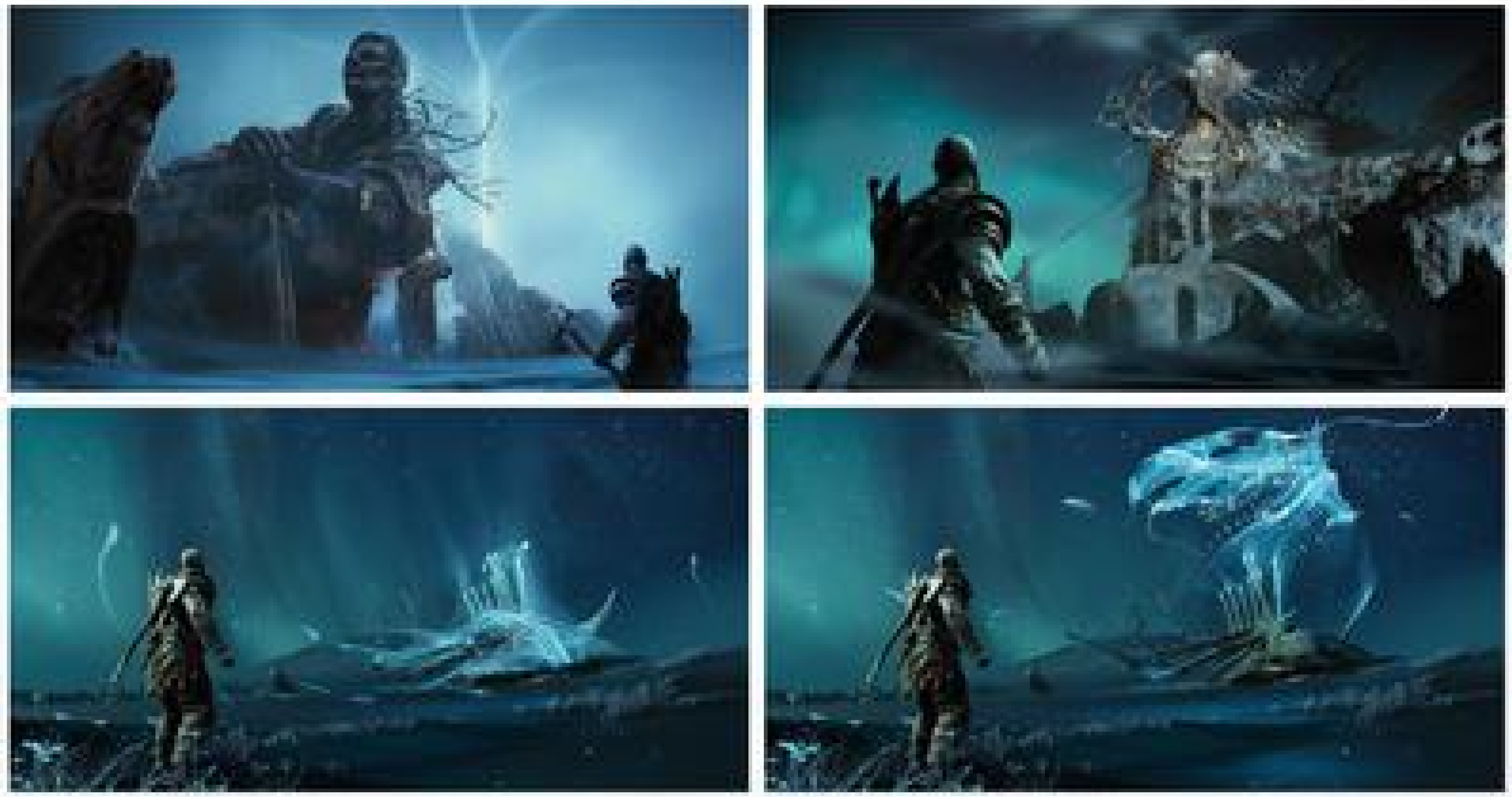


A mysterious beast in Alfheim's barrens. *Artist: Abe Taraky*

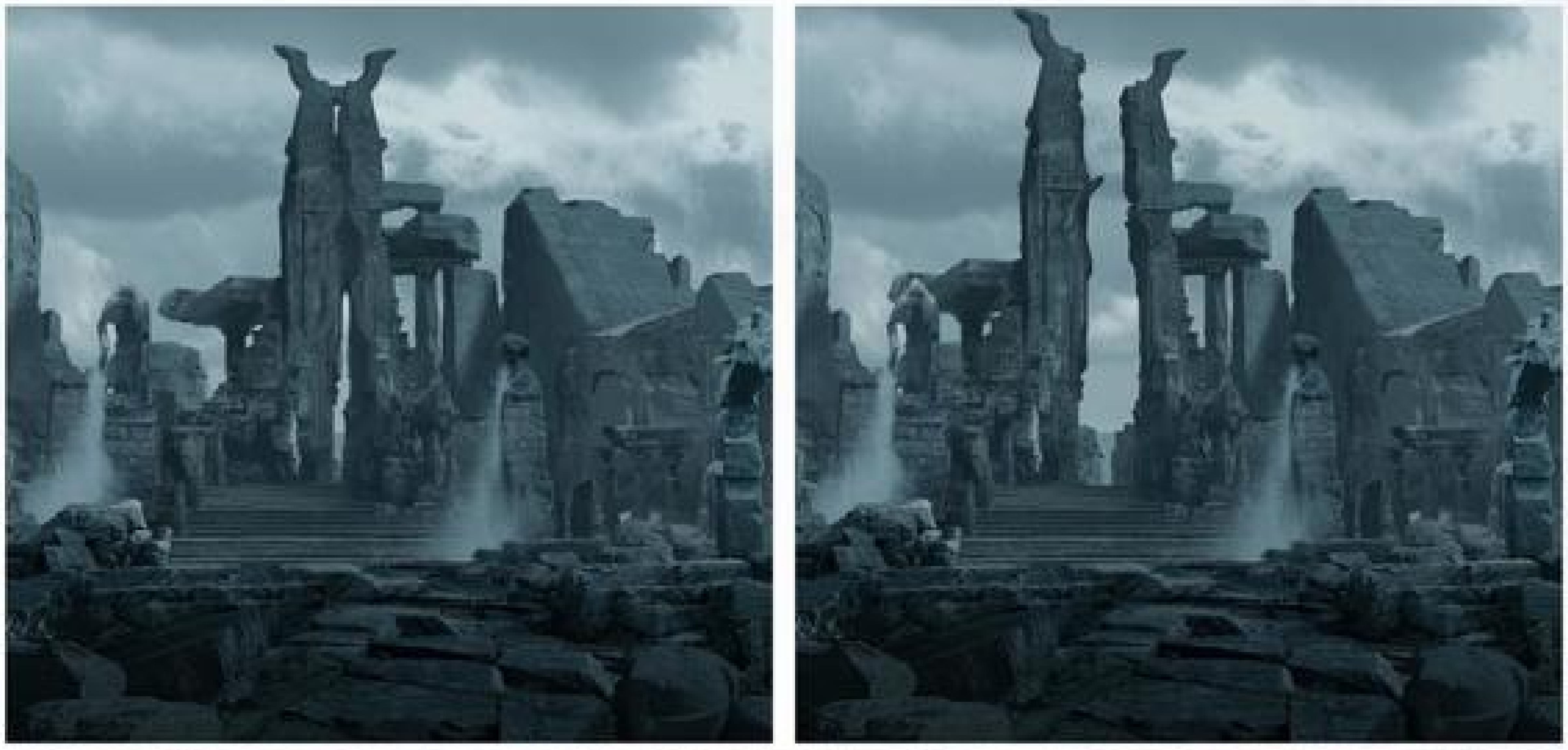


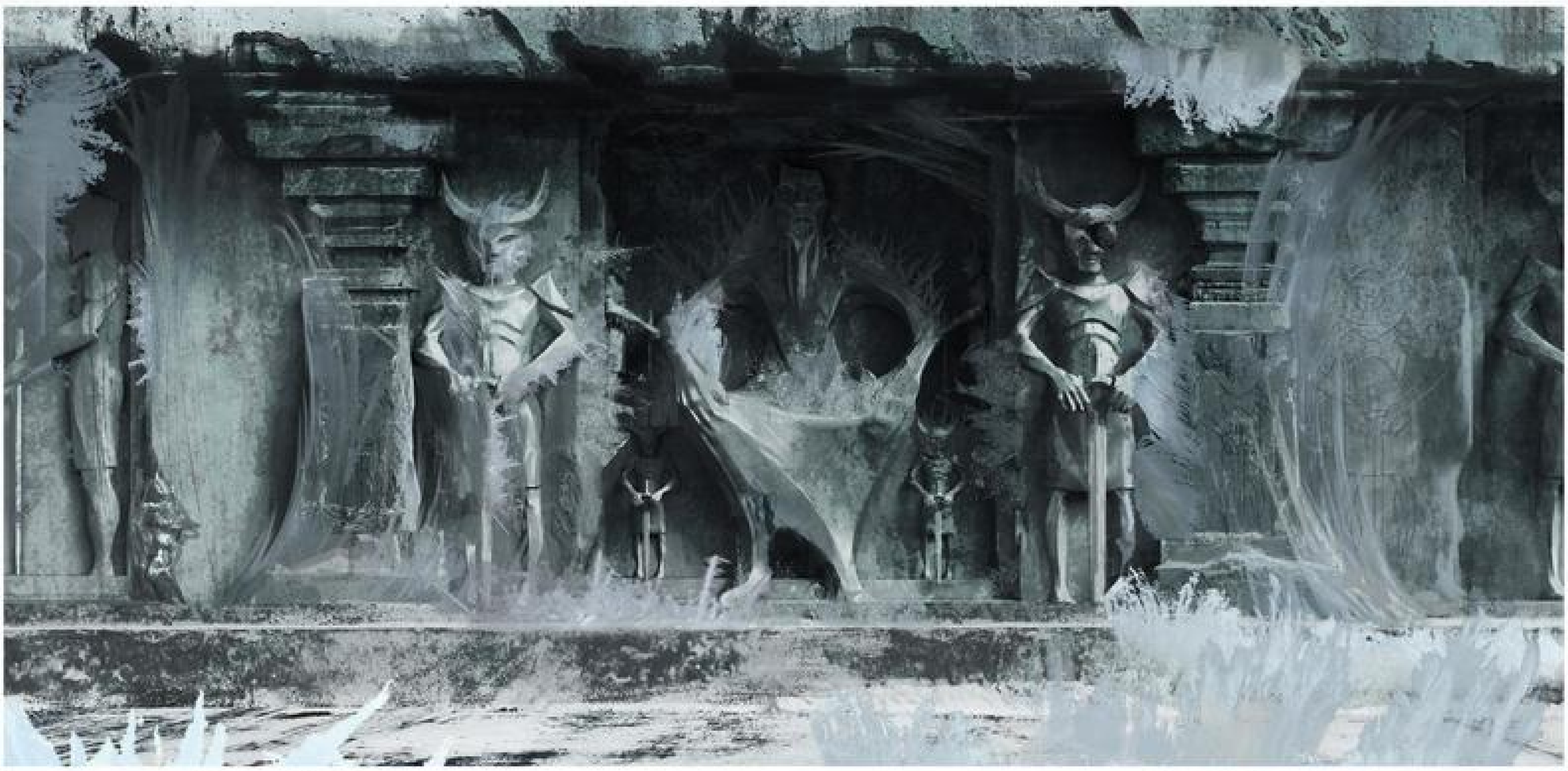
"Having such a wide-open level like the barrens, we wanted to create unique points of interest you could find as you explored," Berliner said. "Some were large enough to call your attention from afar. Scars from past battles fought, ancient beasts, ruins of a past life this area once held. The early pitch was to make this space feel like a dry ocean. Many of the ideas tried to incorporate some aquatic qualities in the area."

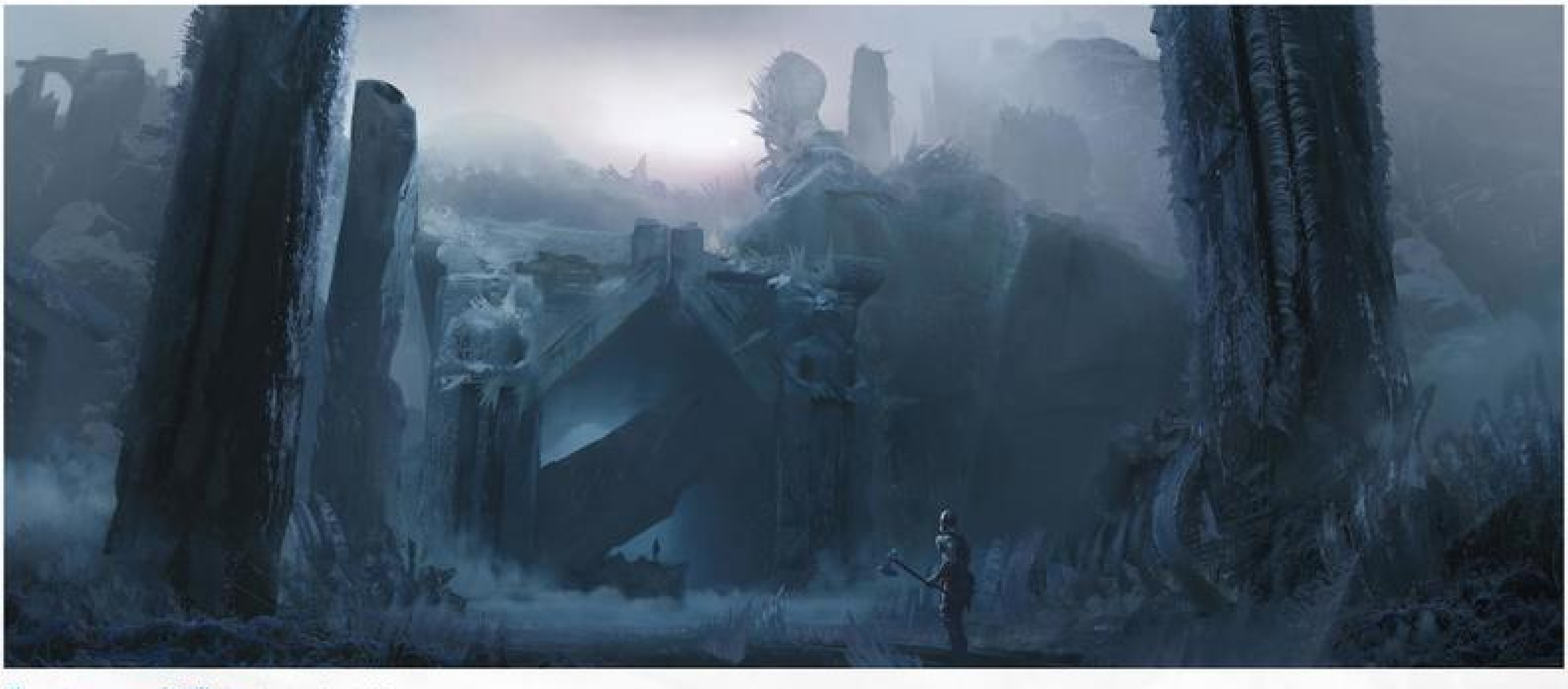
Dry ocean treasure explorations. *Artists: Abe Taraky (top and middle left); Luke Berliner (bottom and middle right)*



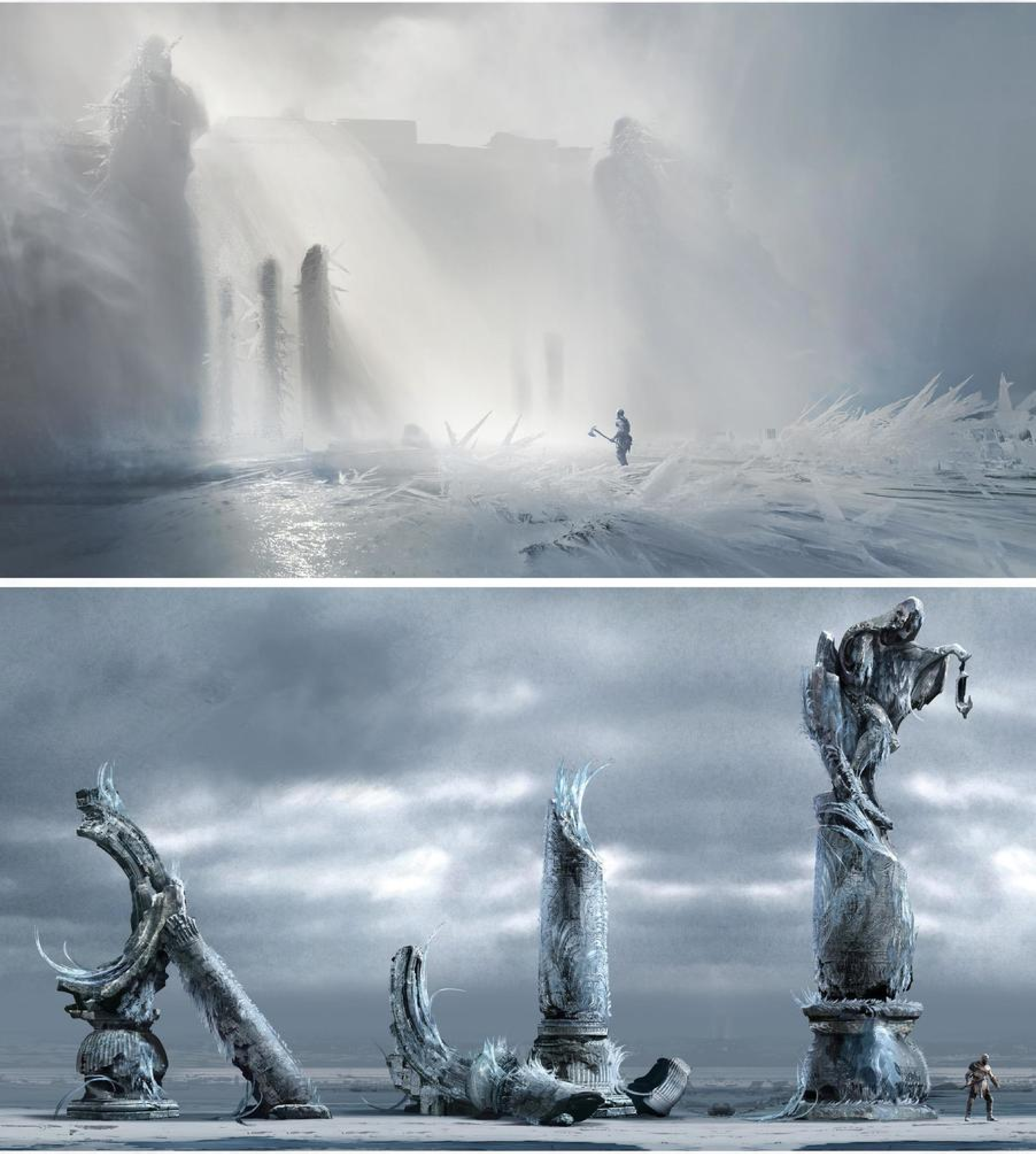
As the artists continued refining the environments for Niflheim and Muspelheim, they searched for ways to create some architectural similarities between the two realms. Here, they imagined the carved stone showing some primordial depictions from a distant past. Director Eric Williams also wanted to show a deep mist in Niflheim, creating a space of absolute stillness both environmentally and aurally that contrasted greatly with the other realms.





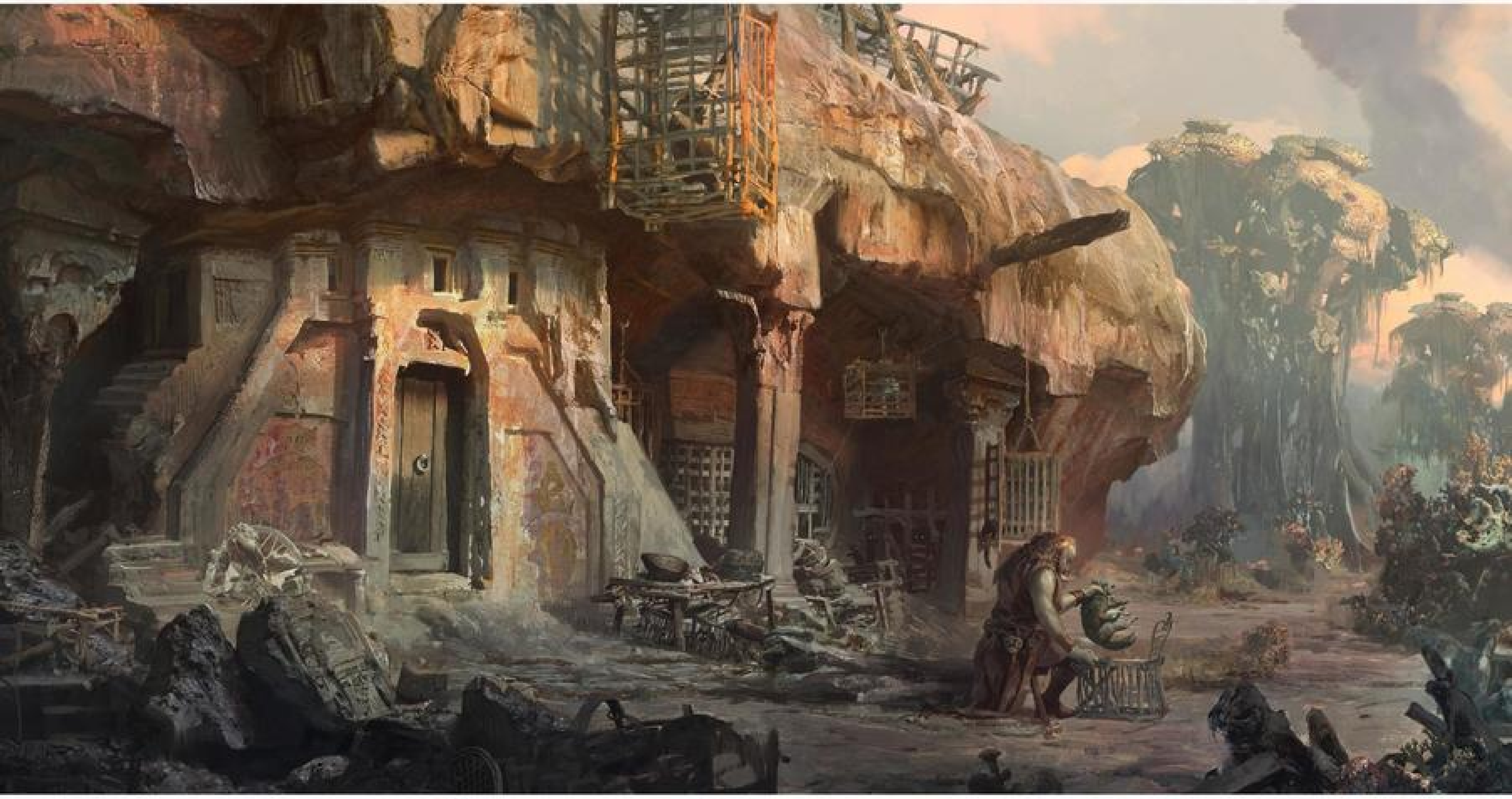


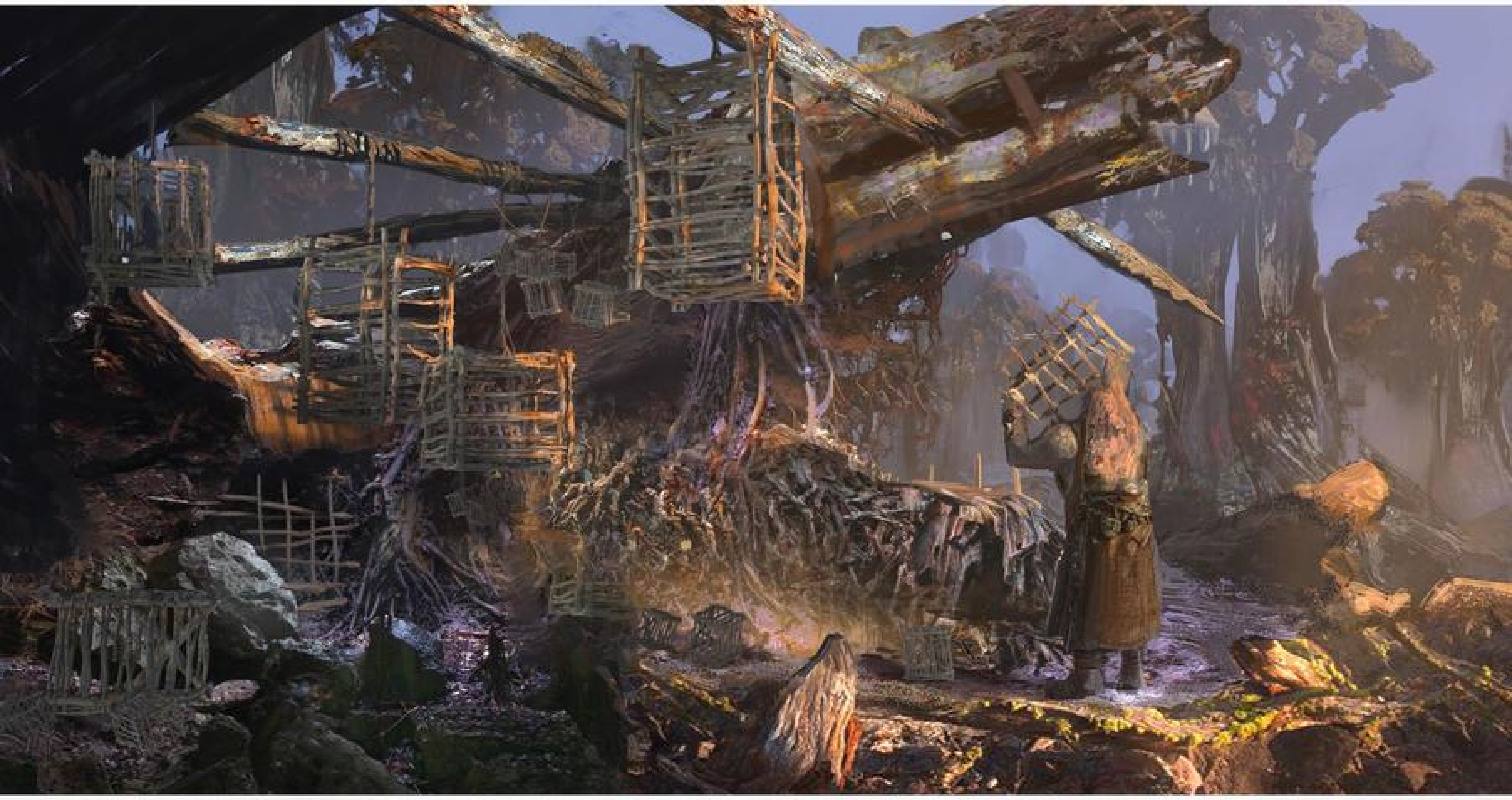
The quiet spaces of Niflheim. Artist: Annis Naeem



Explorations of Niflheim's carved stones. Artists: Annis Naeem (top); Norris Lin (bottom)

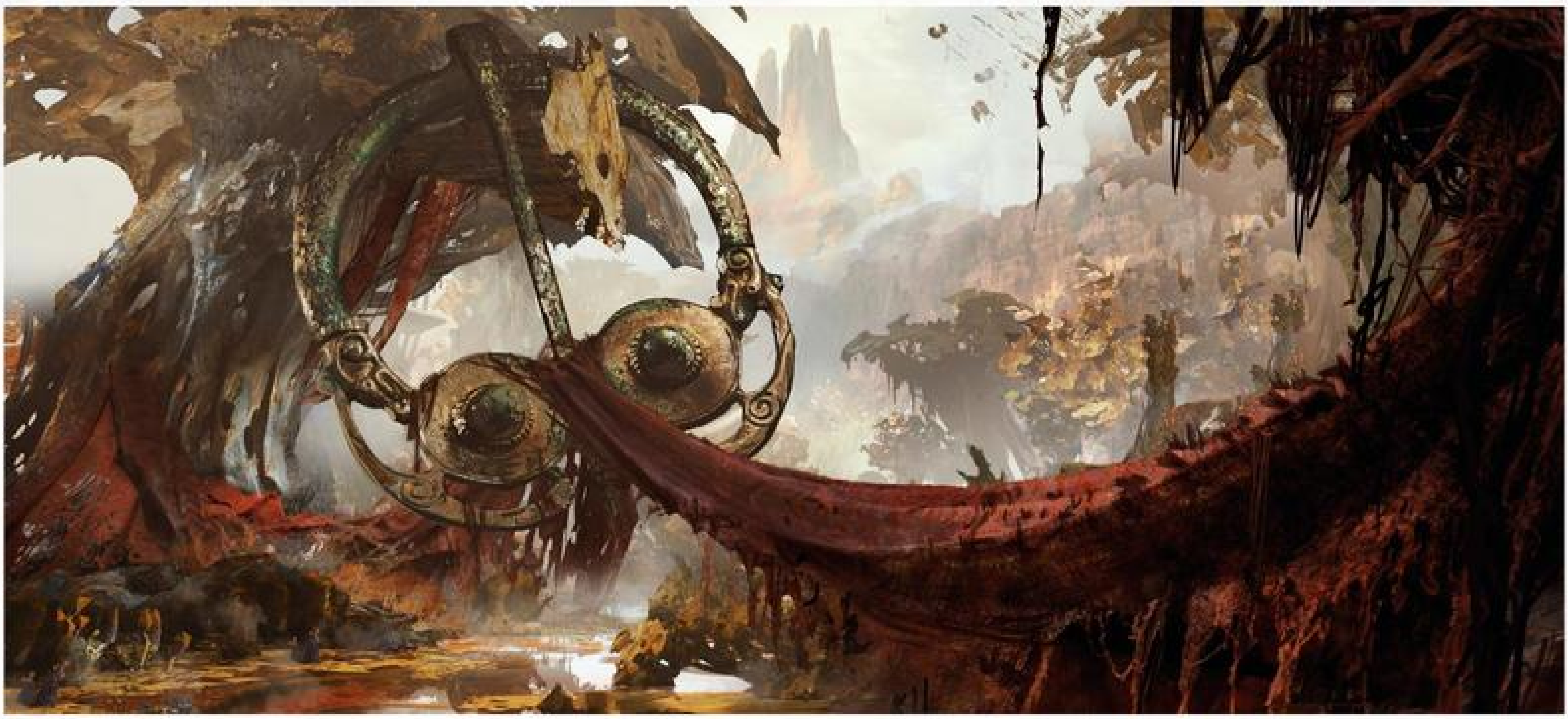
Ironwood structures. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio

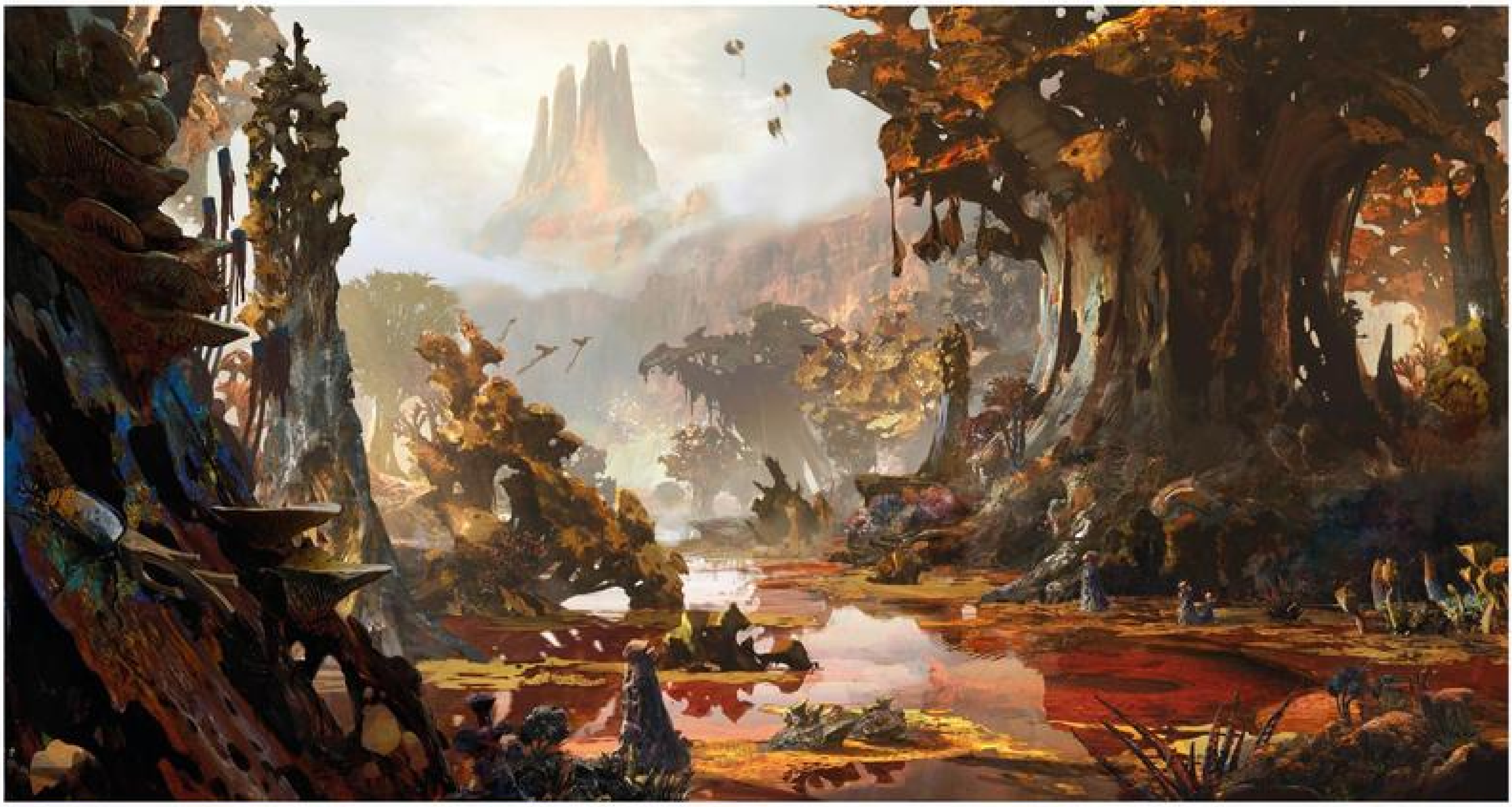


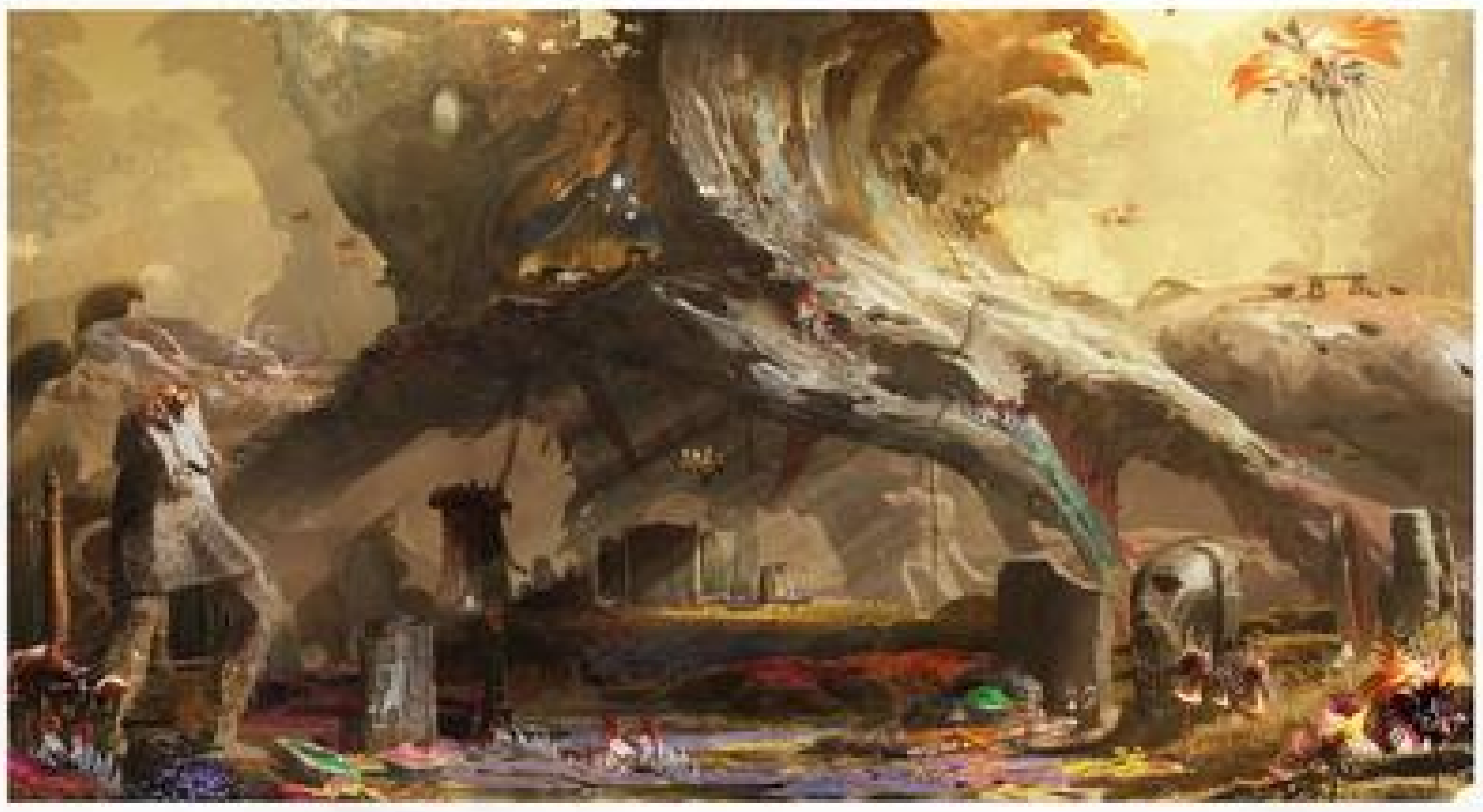


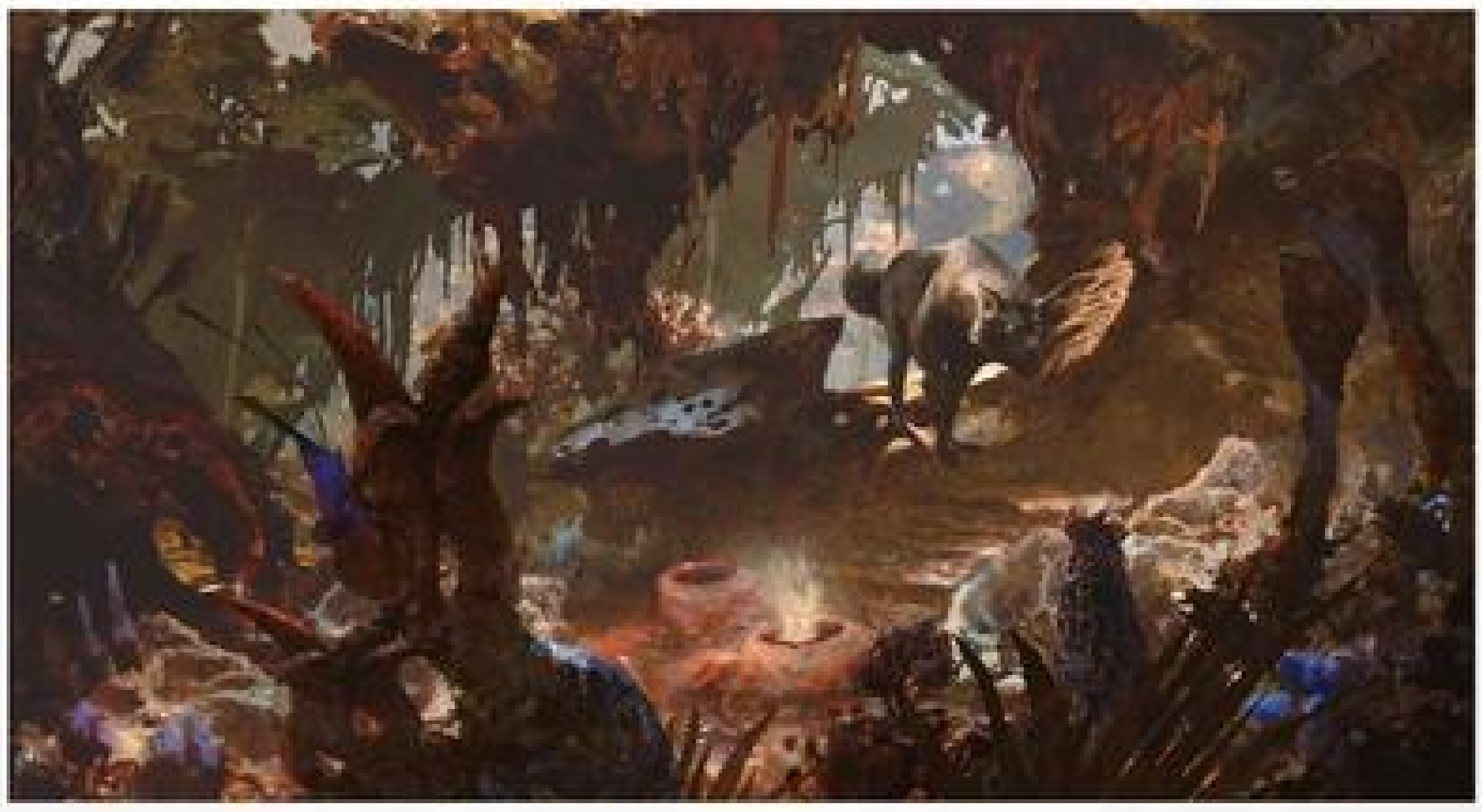
"Building off the early work Mark Castanon did, we continued refining the world, designing a unique biome of plants and pushing Ironwood in a direction unlike any of the others," Berliner said. "Narratively, we really wanted to show a forest that was getting sicker the deeper you ventured into it. Some of the team visited Zion National Park, and it was hard not to pull some inspiration from the deep canyon and rich red colors in the stone."

Exploring Ironwood's vivid hues. Artists: KARAKTER Design Studio (top, middle, and bottom right); Annis Naeem (bottom left)



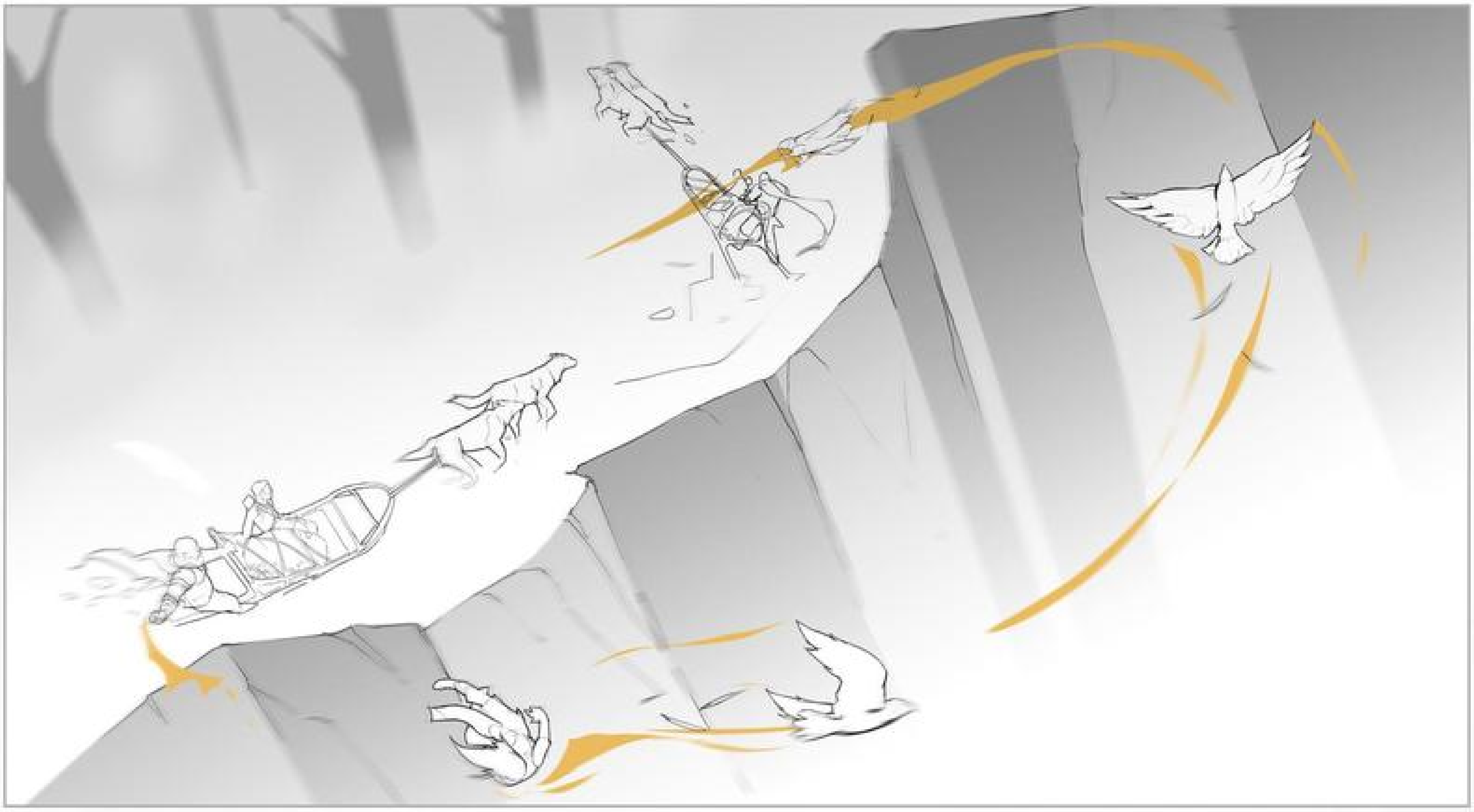


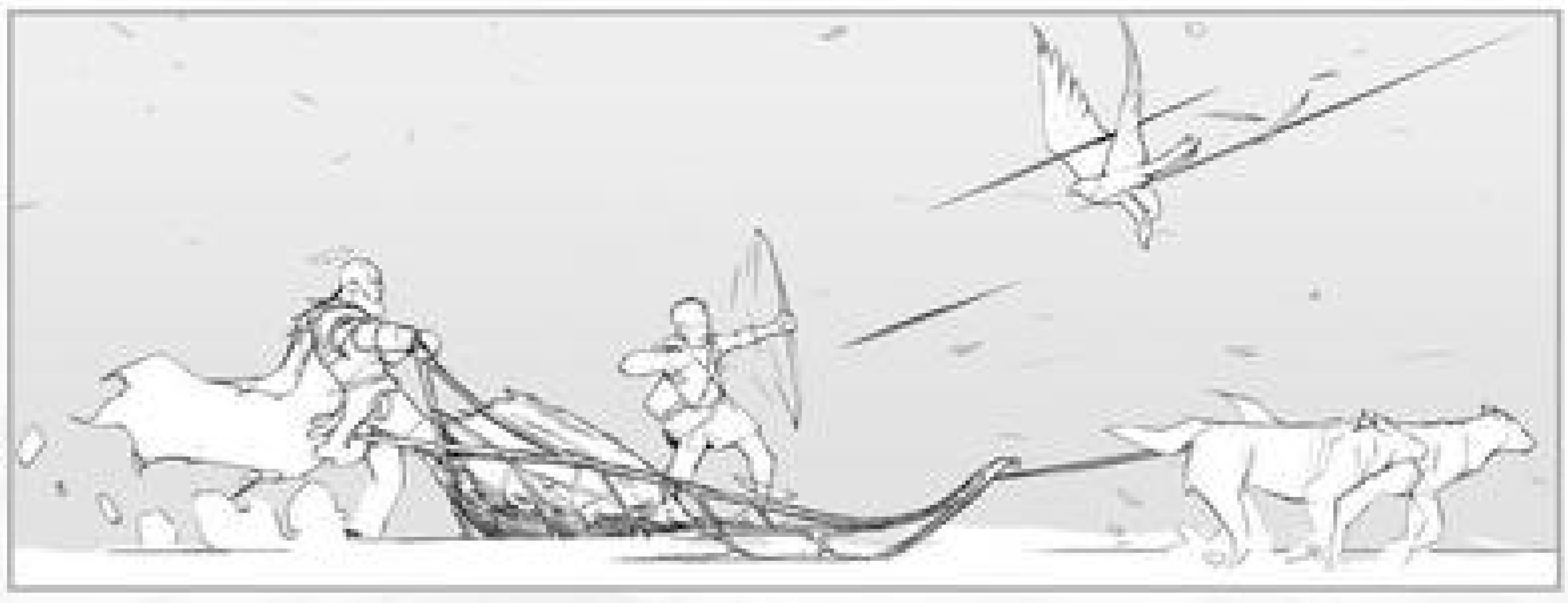


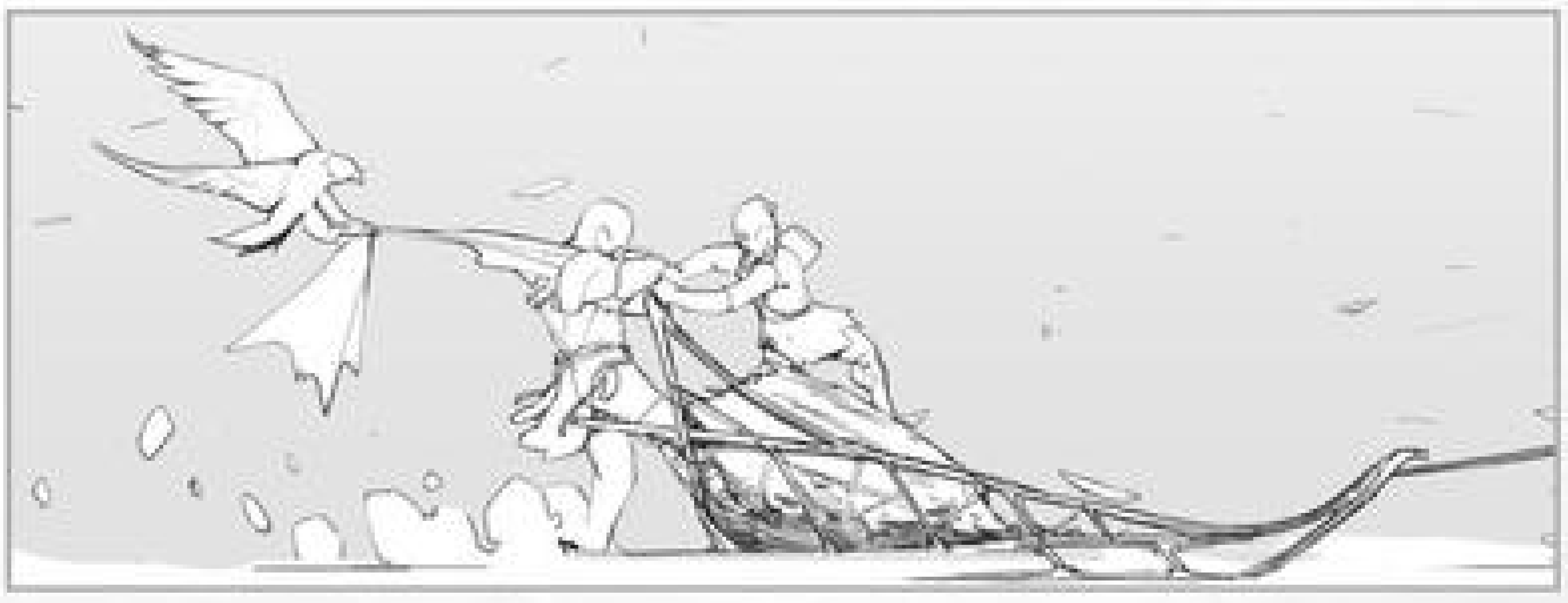


SLED CHASE

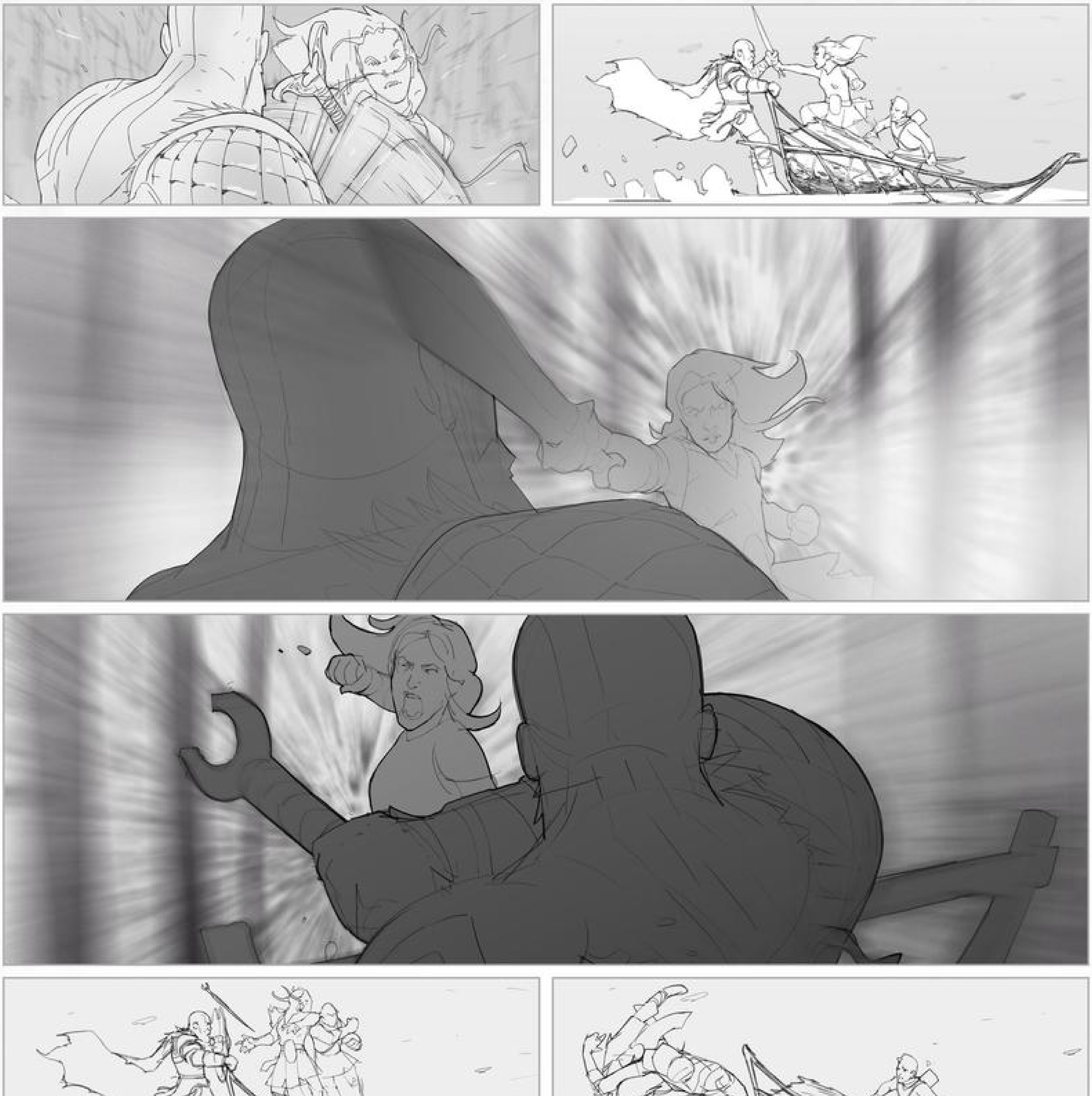
The game opens with a high-speed sled chase that combines combat, interactive gameplay, and narrative sequences. Senior concept artist Joseph Kennedy created storyboards to maximize the action and cinematic moments. "In this sequence, Freya shows her strength by relentlessly attacking the sled with the goal of killing Kratos," Kennedy said. "The high-speed chase limited combat but not the visceral feeling of danger, as danger could come from any direction. The sequence culminates when Freya breaks through Atreus' defenses and stabs Kratos through the shoulder."





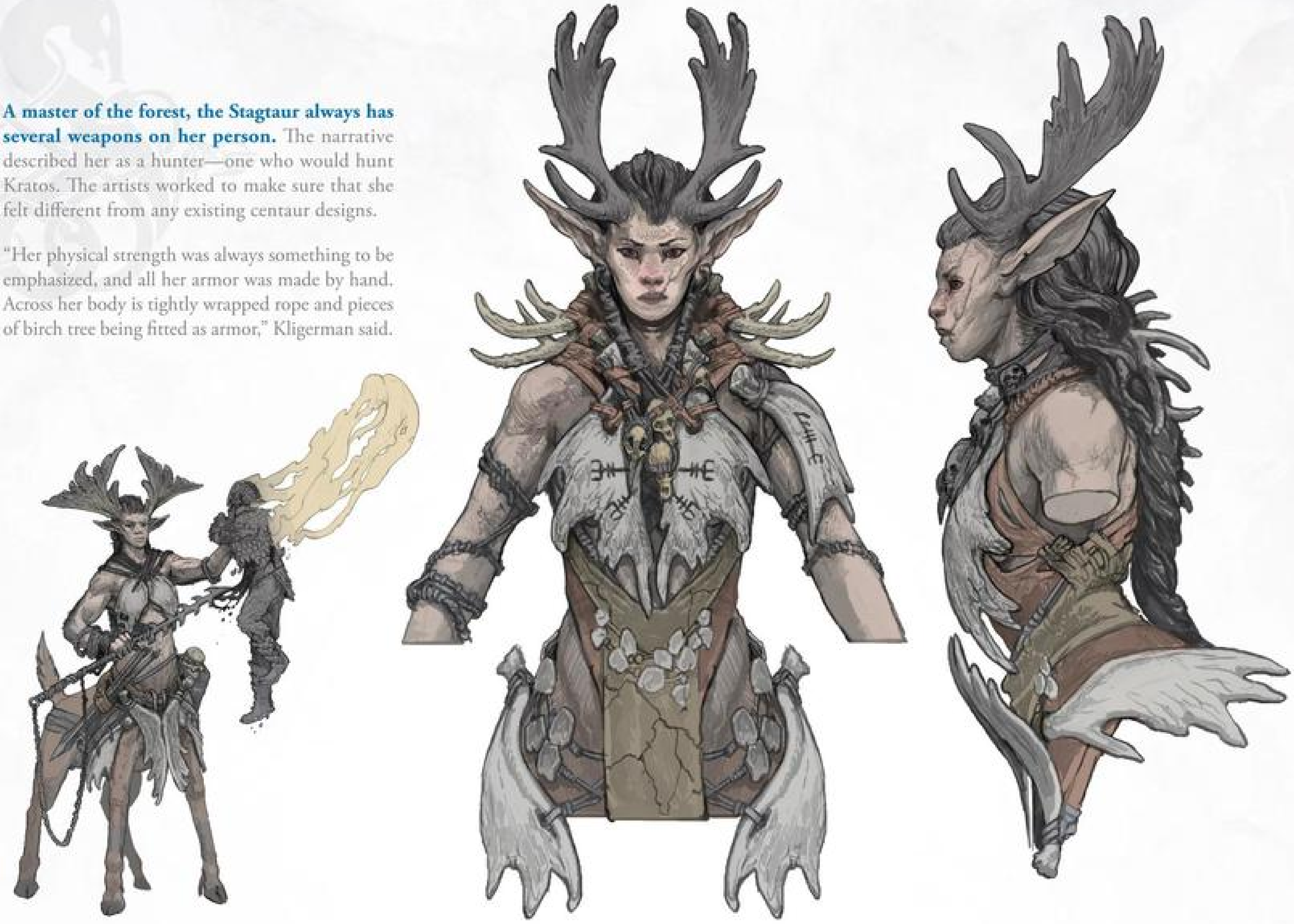


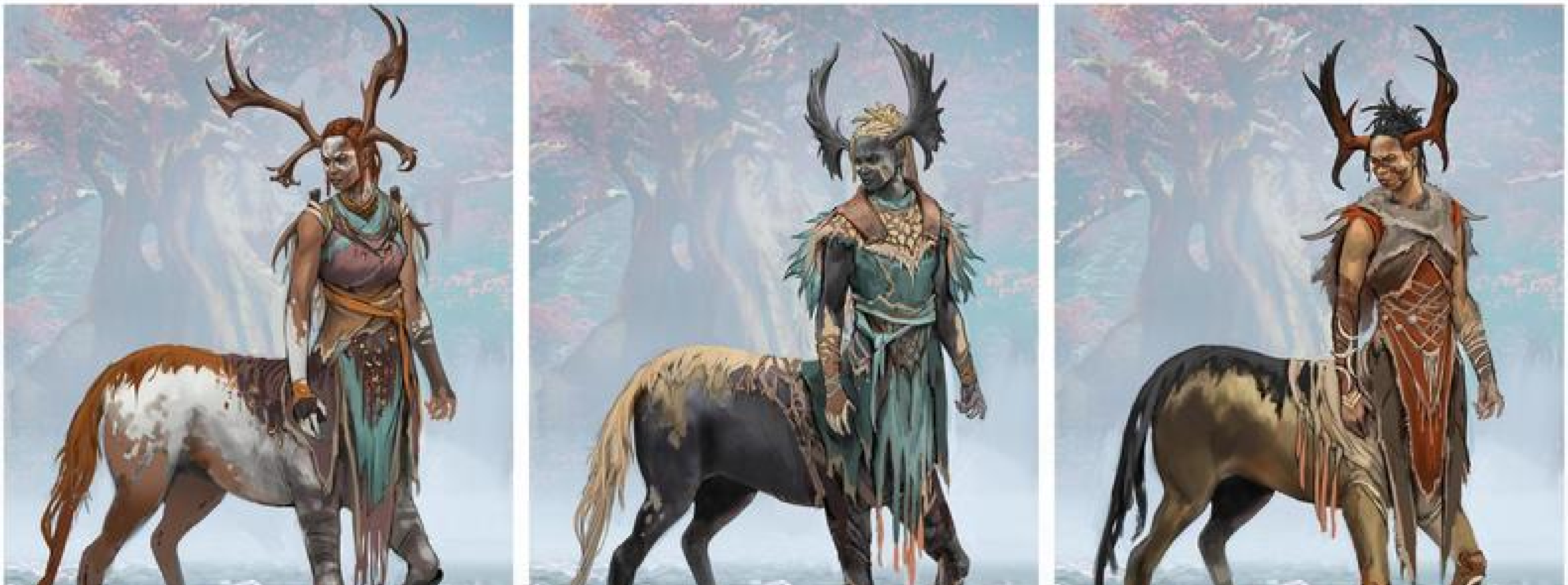
Sled chase storyboards. Artists: Shan Qiao (opposite top); Joseph Kennedy (opposite bottom and this page)



A master of the forest, the Stagtaur always has several weapons on her person. The narrative described her as a hunter—one who would hunt Kratos. The artists worked to make sure that she felt different from any existing centaur designs.

"Her physical strength was always something to be emphasized, and all her armor was made by hand. Across her body is tightly wrapped rope and pieces of birch tree being fitted as armor," Kligerman said.





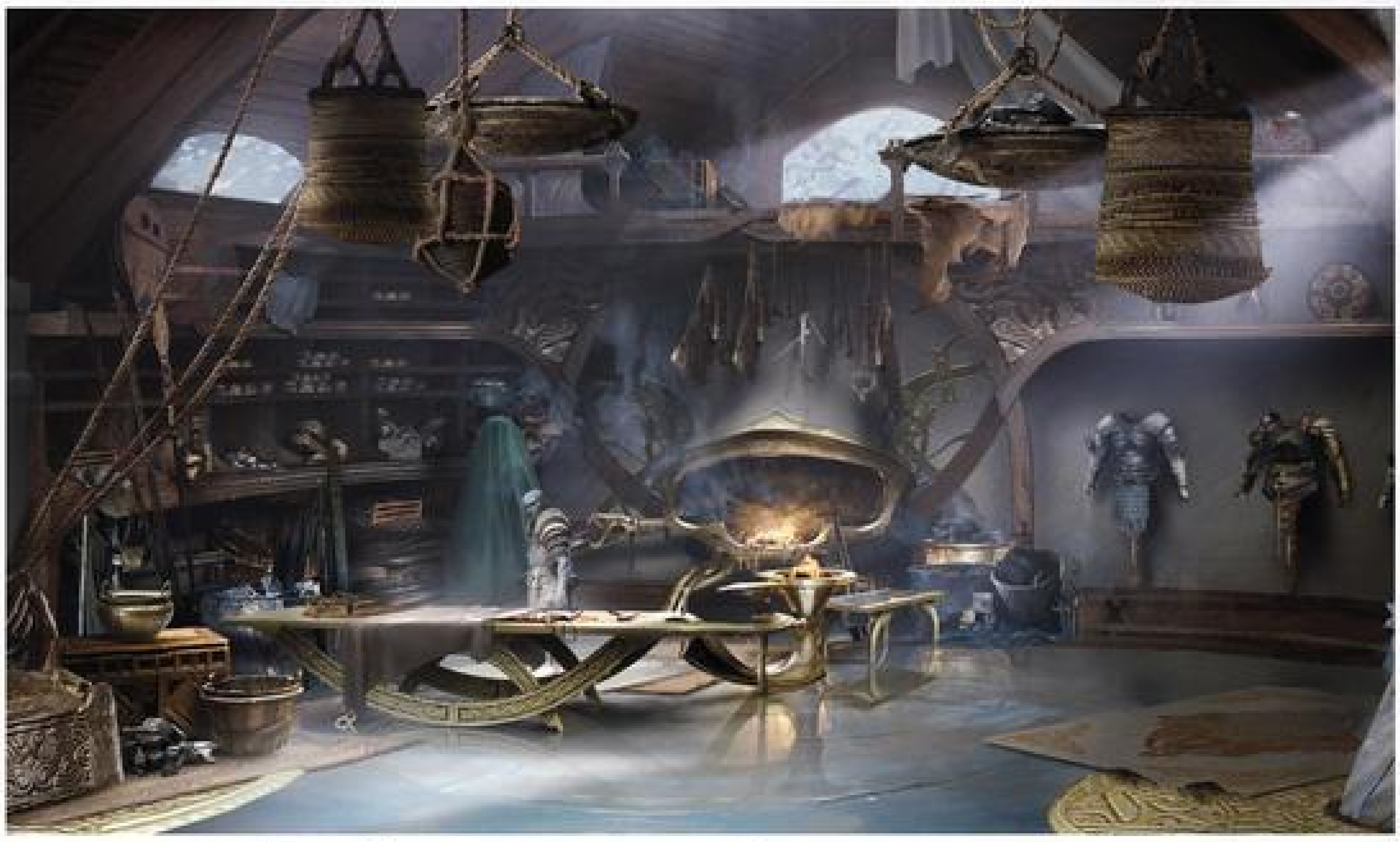
Stagtaur clothing ideas. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Yefim Kligerman (bottom and opposite)

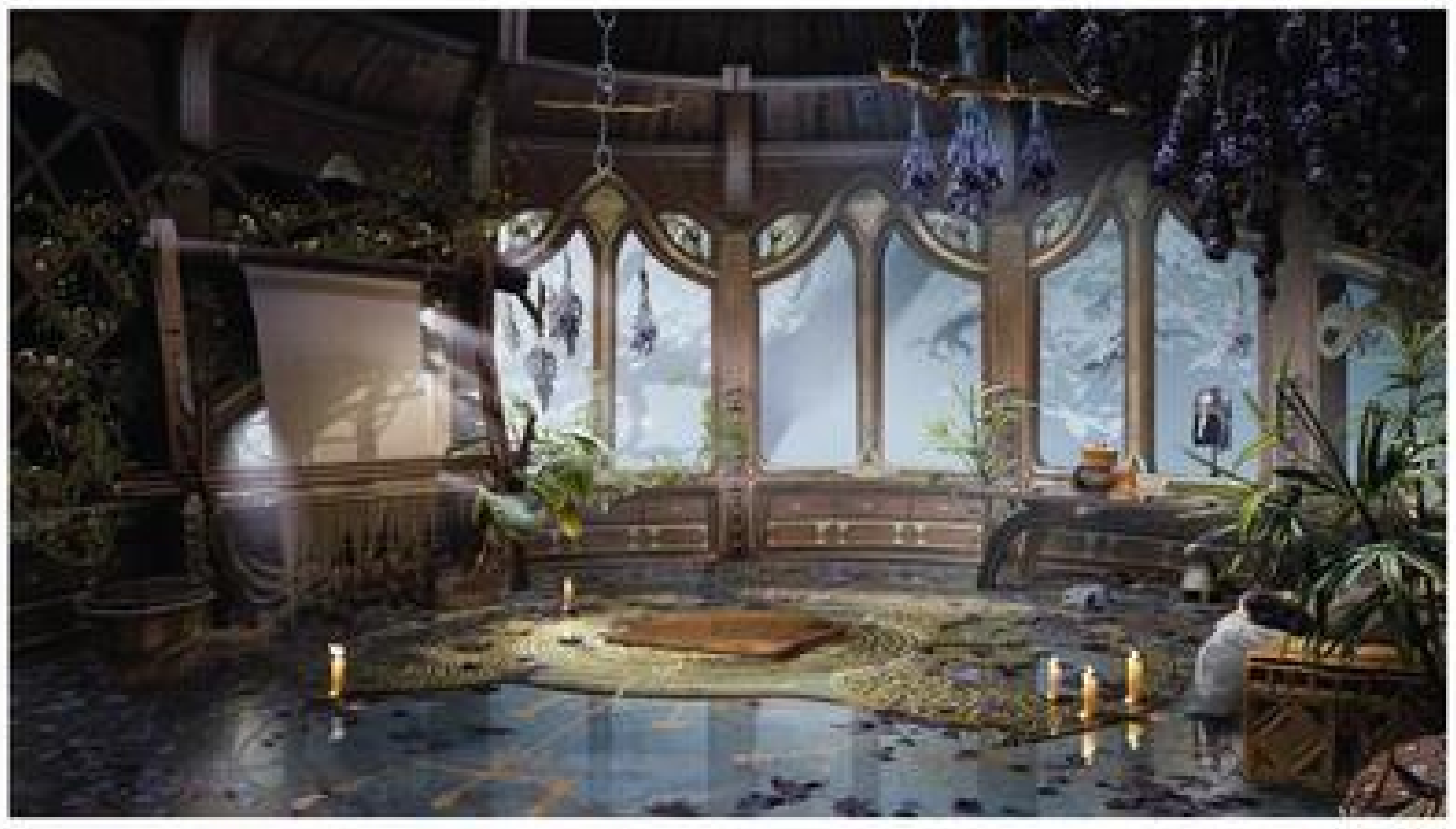
At one point, the Alfheim level might have simply been a long elevator ride up with a splash in the water at the end, but the level evolved and took shape through collaboration between Abe Taraky, Melissa Smith in environment art, and designer Vicki Smith. Melissa Smith said, "Frequent early iterations in the studio created areas that felt unique and fun for players to explore. For example, Alfheim's climax was initially one long fall from the top."

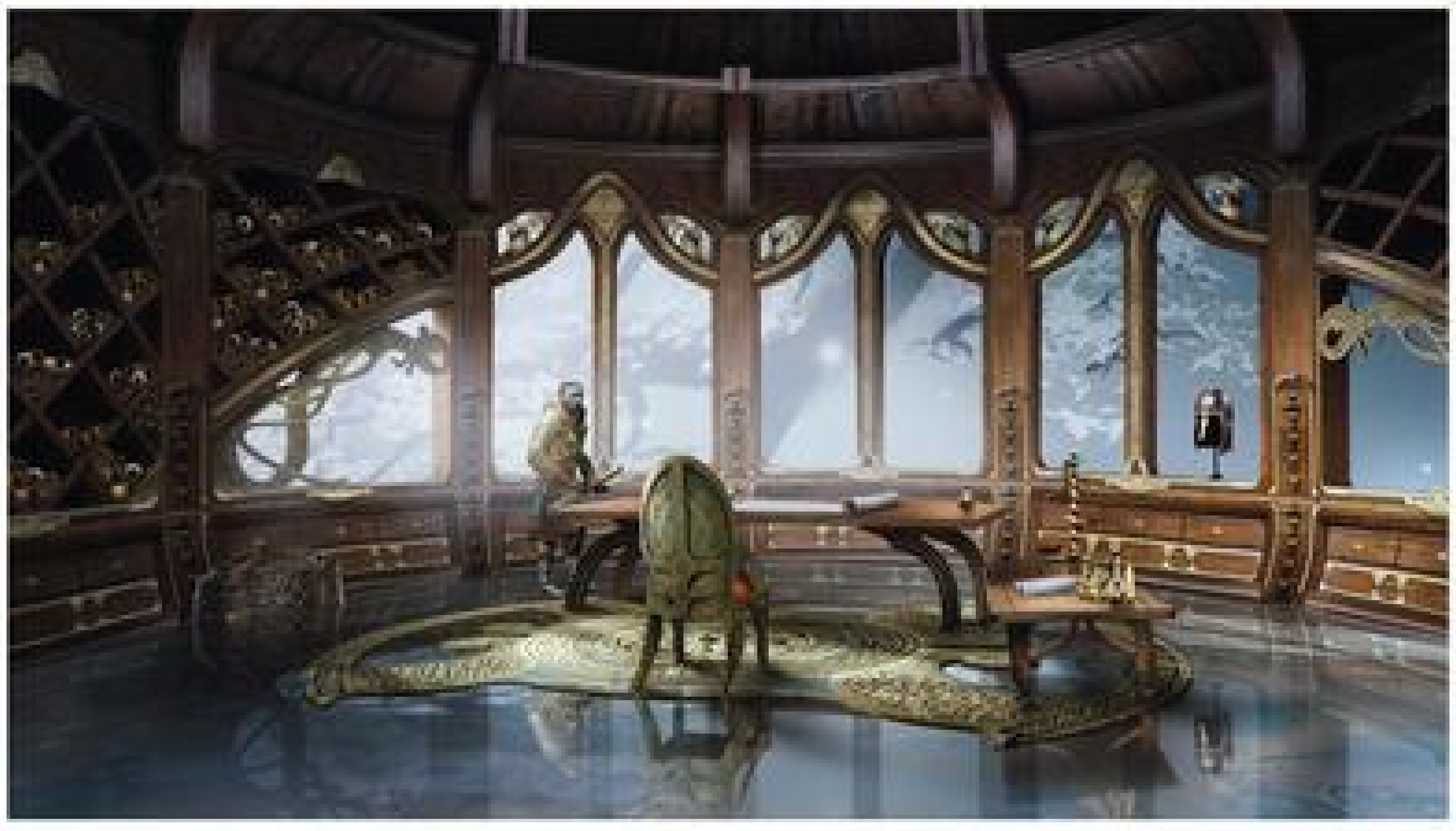
Instead, the team opted to enhance the gameplay with elements like descending traversal and combat mechanics integrated into the level to make the player feel empowered and motivated.

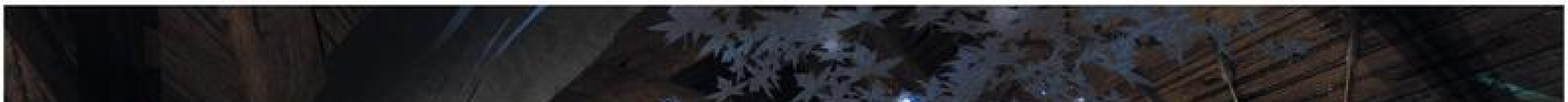
The Alfheim climb. Artists: Abe Taraky (top, middle, and opposite); Melissa Smith, Sam Bean (bottom)

***Ragnarök* frequently returns to Sindri's home in the Realm between Realms,** meaning the team could take the time for environmental storytelling. Berliner recalled, "As more and more people come to stay at Sindri's home, the more opportunity we had to show their impact. Sindri is fastidious and everything has a place, so the more people that come in, the more chaos and reorganization occur. We looked for ways to convert offices, muddy up the floor, and even take over the pantry."

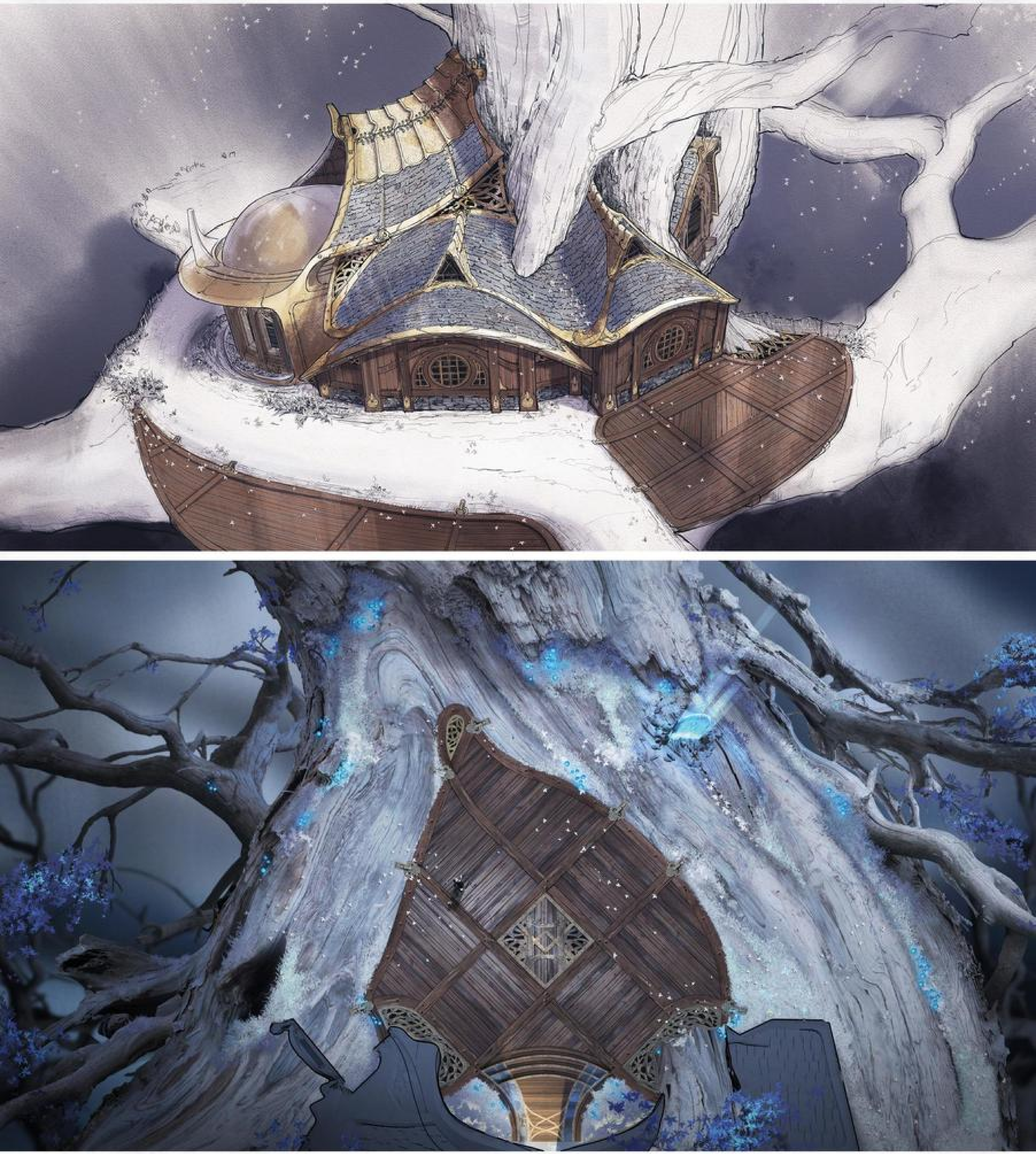








Interiors of Sindri's house. Artist: Luke Berliner

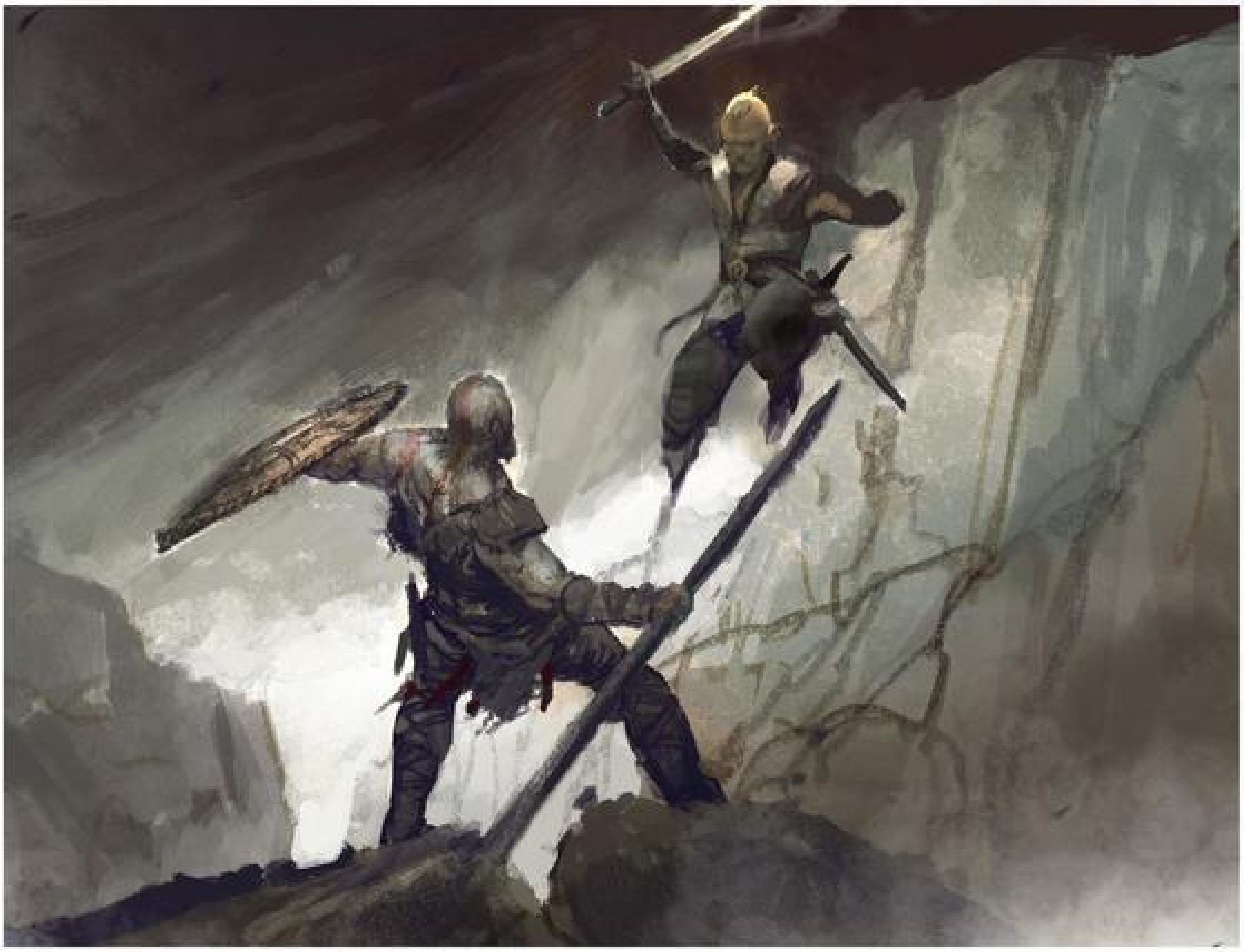


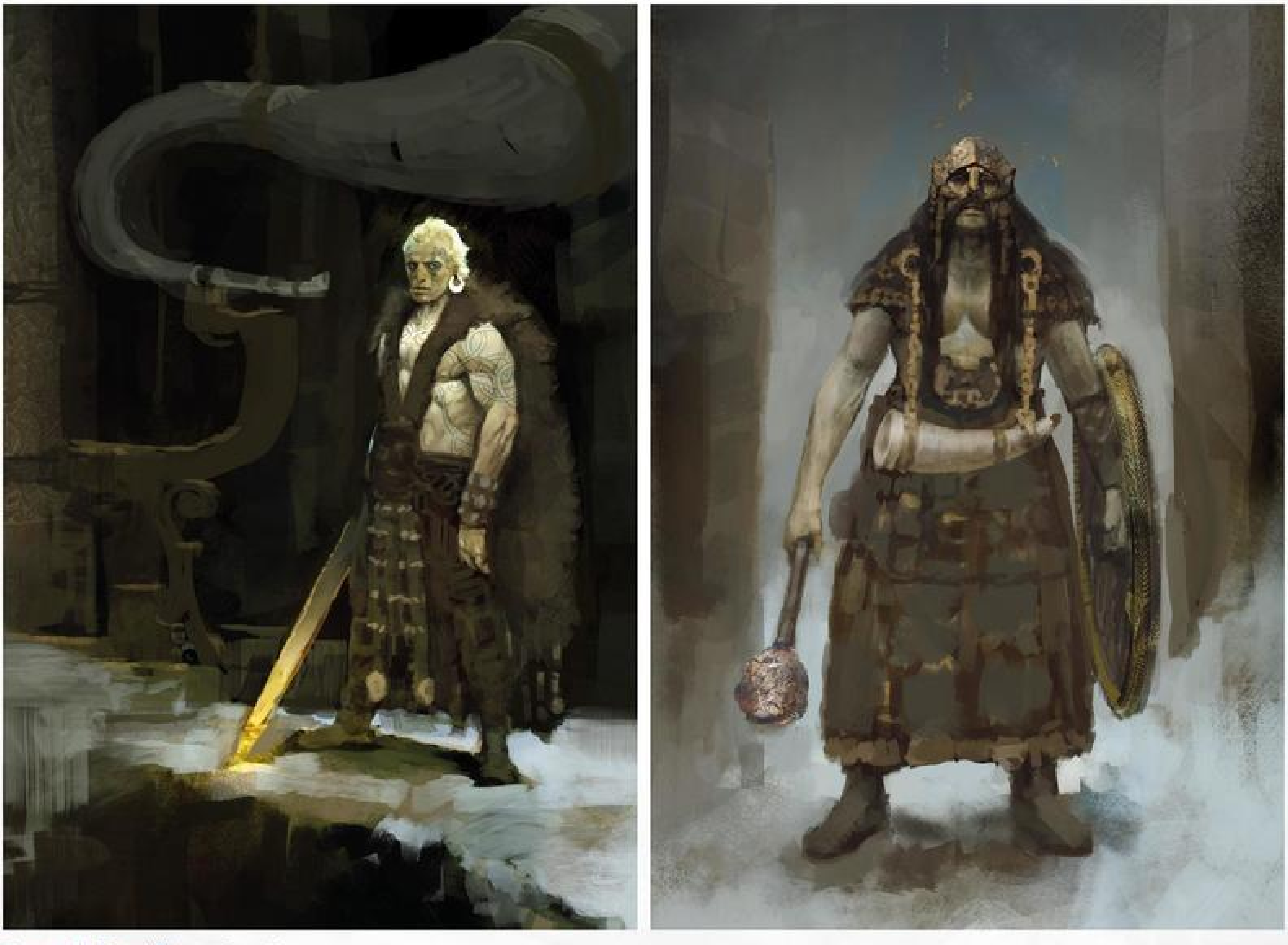
Svartalfheim architecture seen on the exteriors of Sindri's home. Artist: Matteo Marjoram

HEIMDALL

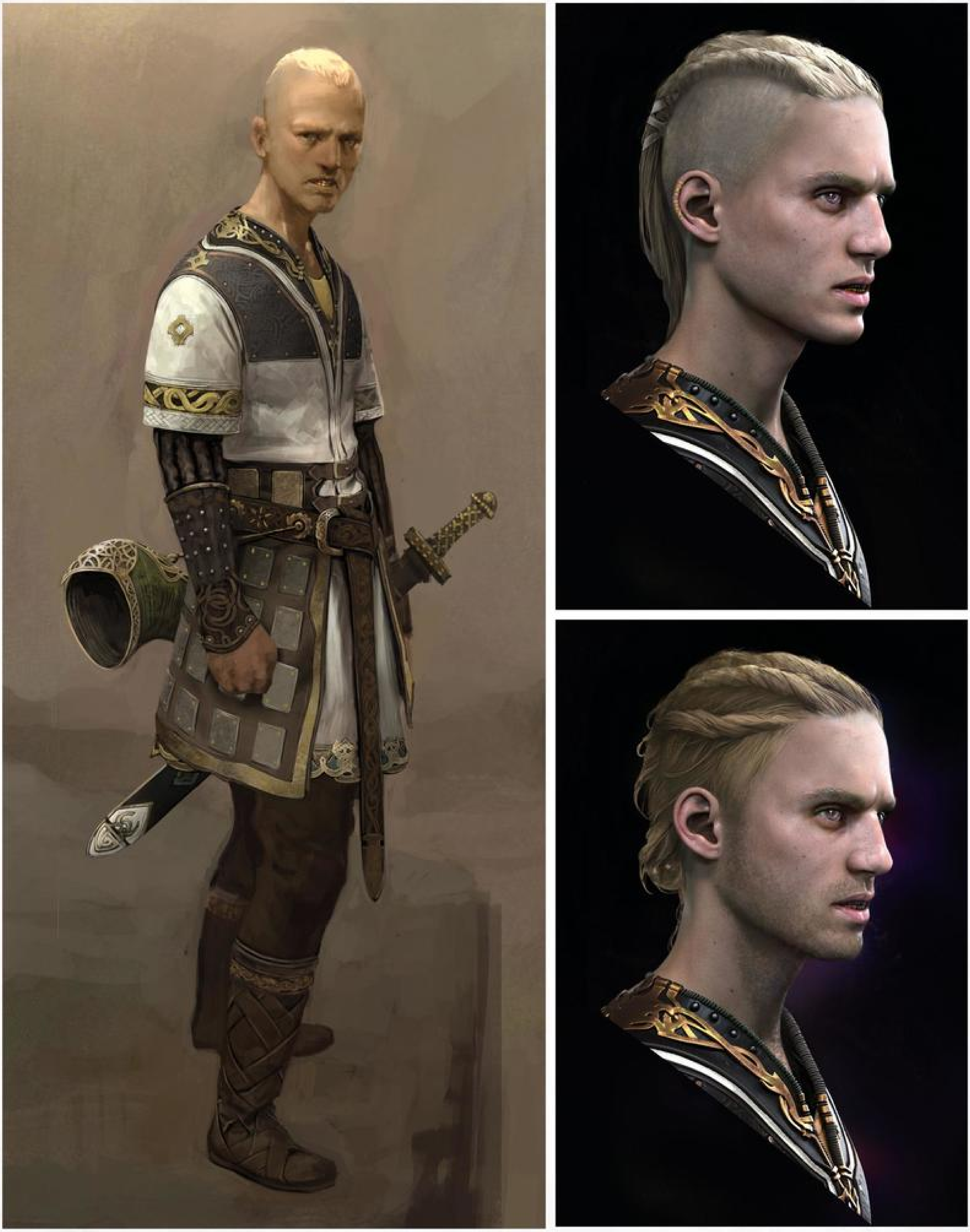
Heimdall proved to be a particular challenge to design. As the god who watches for invaders to Asgard and keeps an eye out for the arrival of Ragnarök, he needed to stand apart from the others in his design and costuming.

Longfish said, "With Heimdall, we wanted a look that stood out from the other gods. Not only does he have the most ornate costume of all the Norse gods, but he is also the youngest. As he's someone able to see the future, his look also needed to convey a sense of arrogance. Vance nailed all of this by also adding a pristine white that doesn't have a speck of dirt on it."



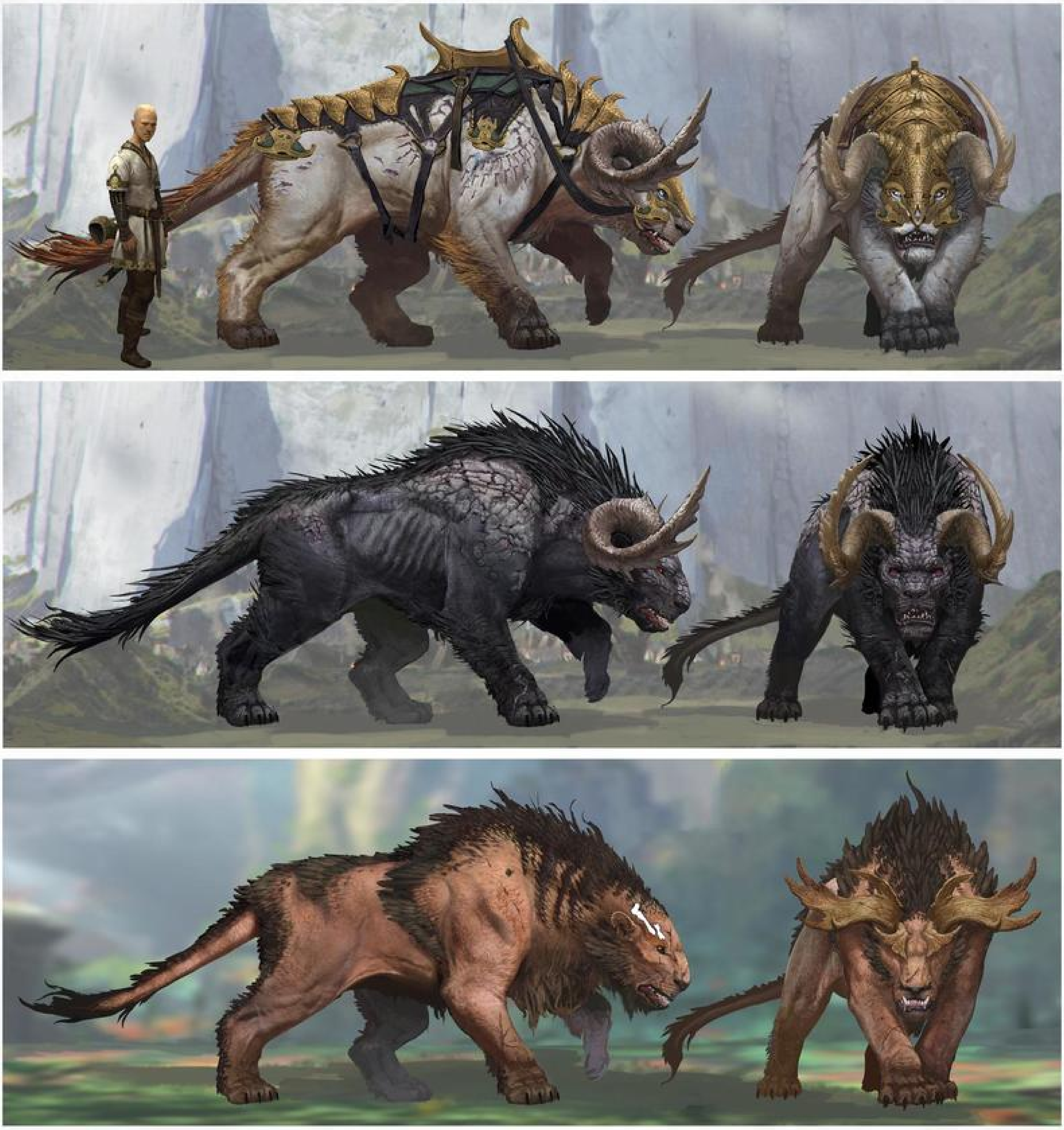


Concepts for Heimdall. Artist: Vance Kovacs

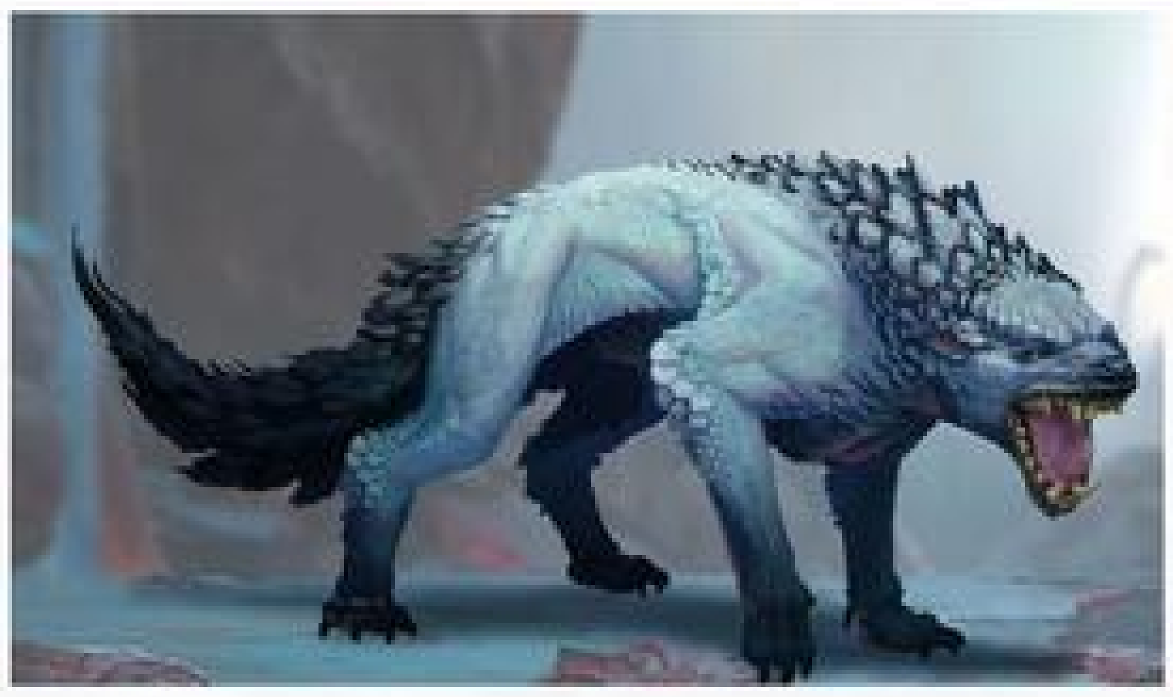


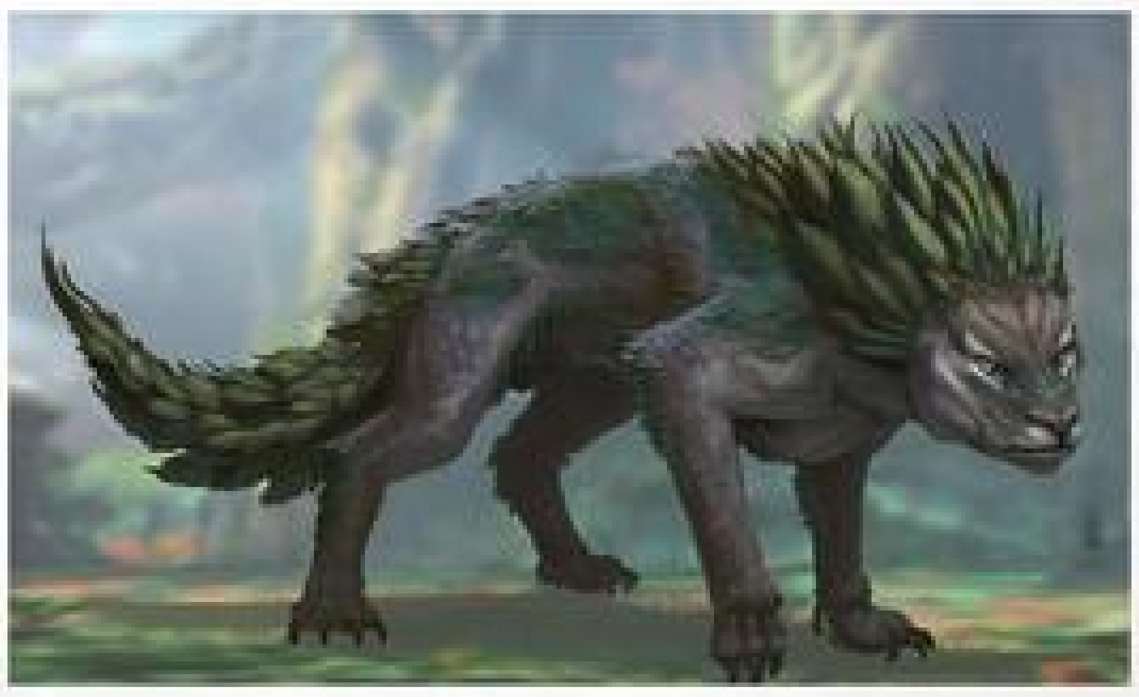
Artists: Vance Kovacs (left); Dela Longfish, Rafael Grassetti (right)

Experimenting with various animal appearances for realm runners. Artist: Stephen Oakley

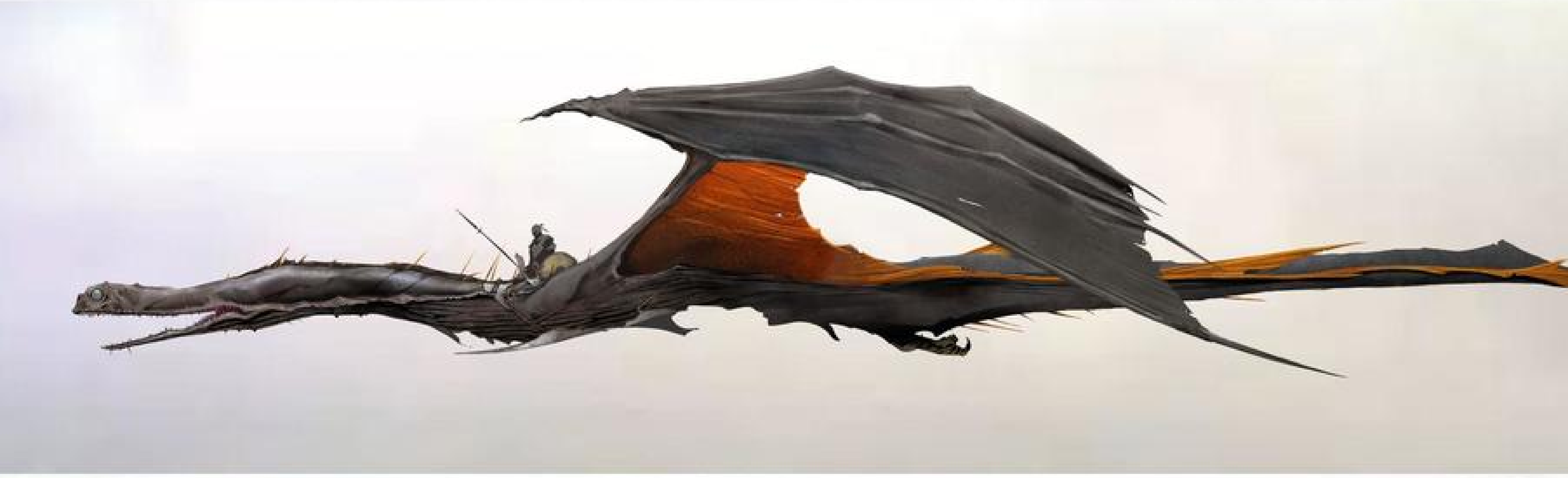


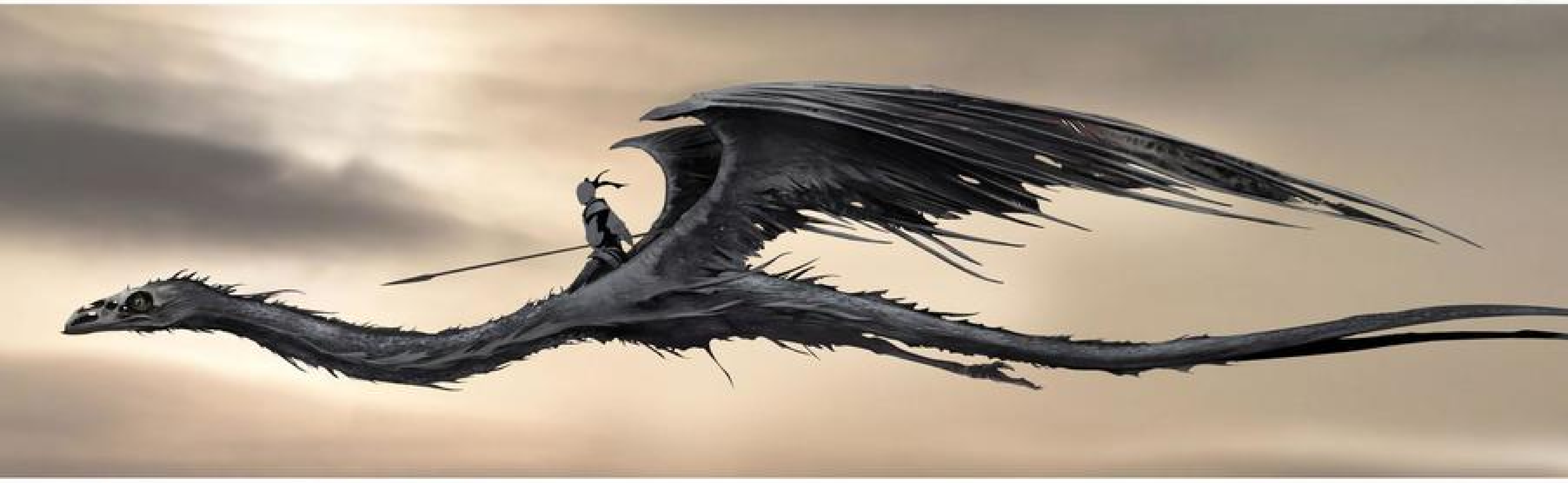
The realm runner started as a more drake-like creature, but the artists wanted to break away from lizard archetypes. Oakley said, "We still wanted to retain the wide bulk and brutish power we had first agreed on. So the moose was an easy pick, and each variation added different vibes—the Vanaheim ones that followed felt more avian versus the prickly look of the Asgardians."

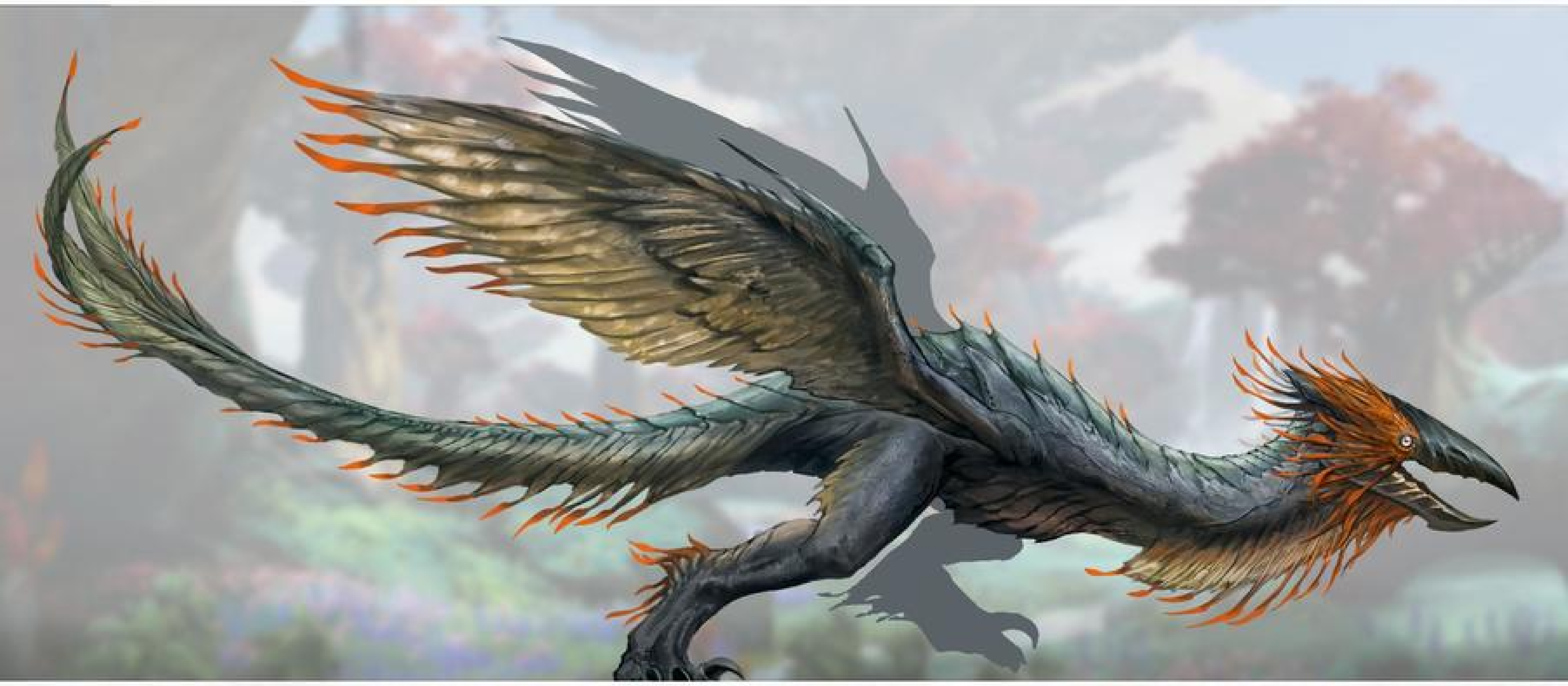




Realm glider skin texture concepts. Artists: Dela Longfish (top and middle); Yefim Kligerman (bottom)

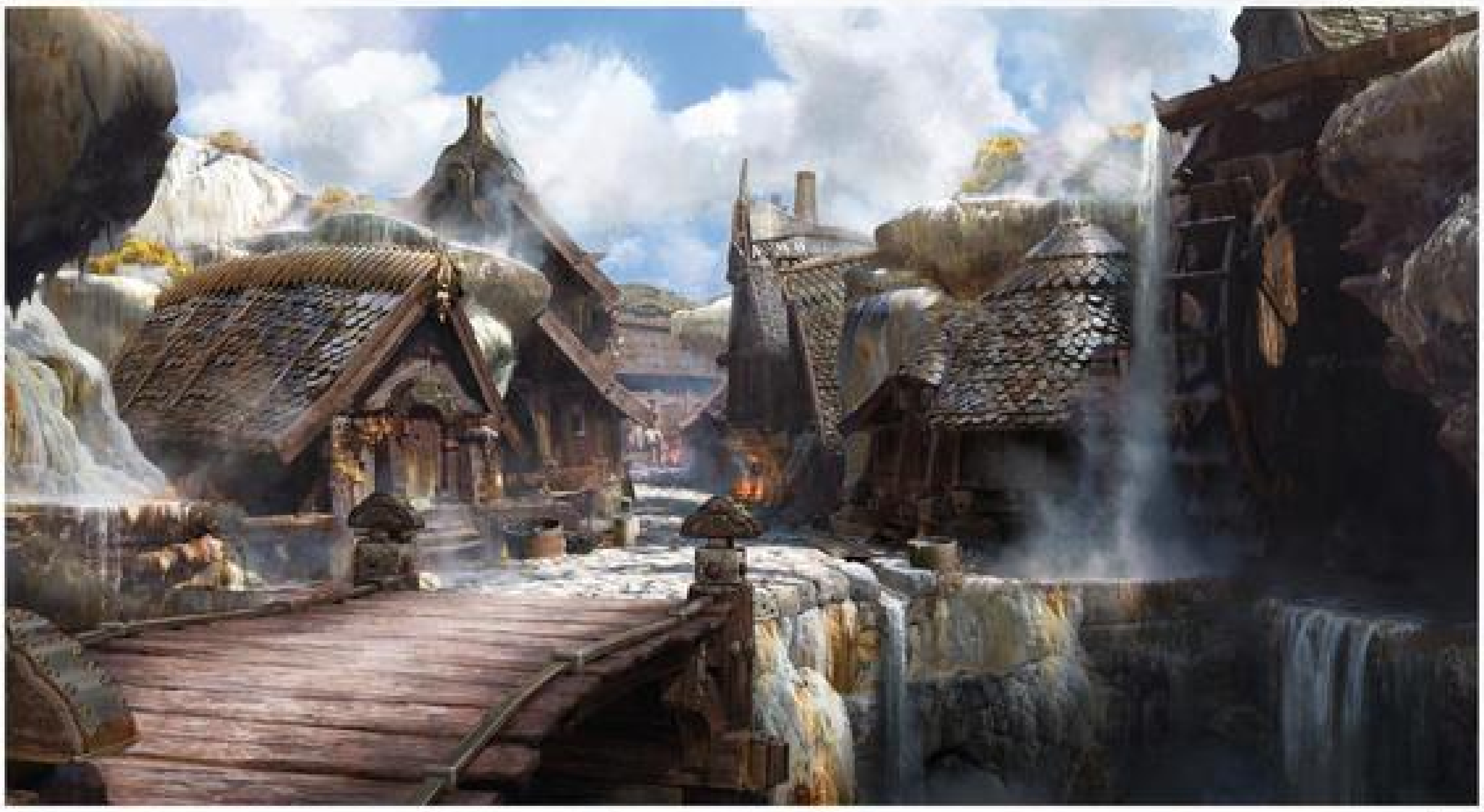




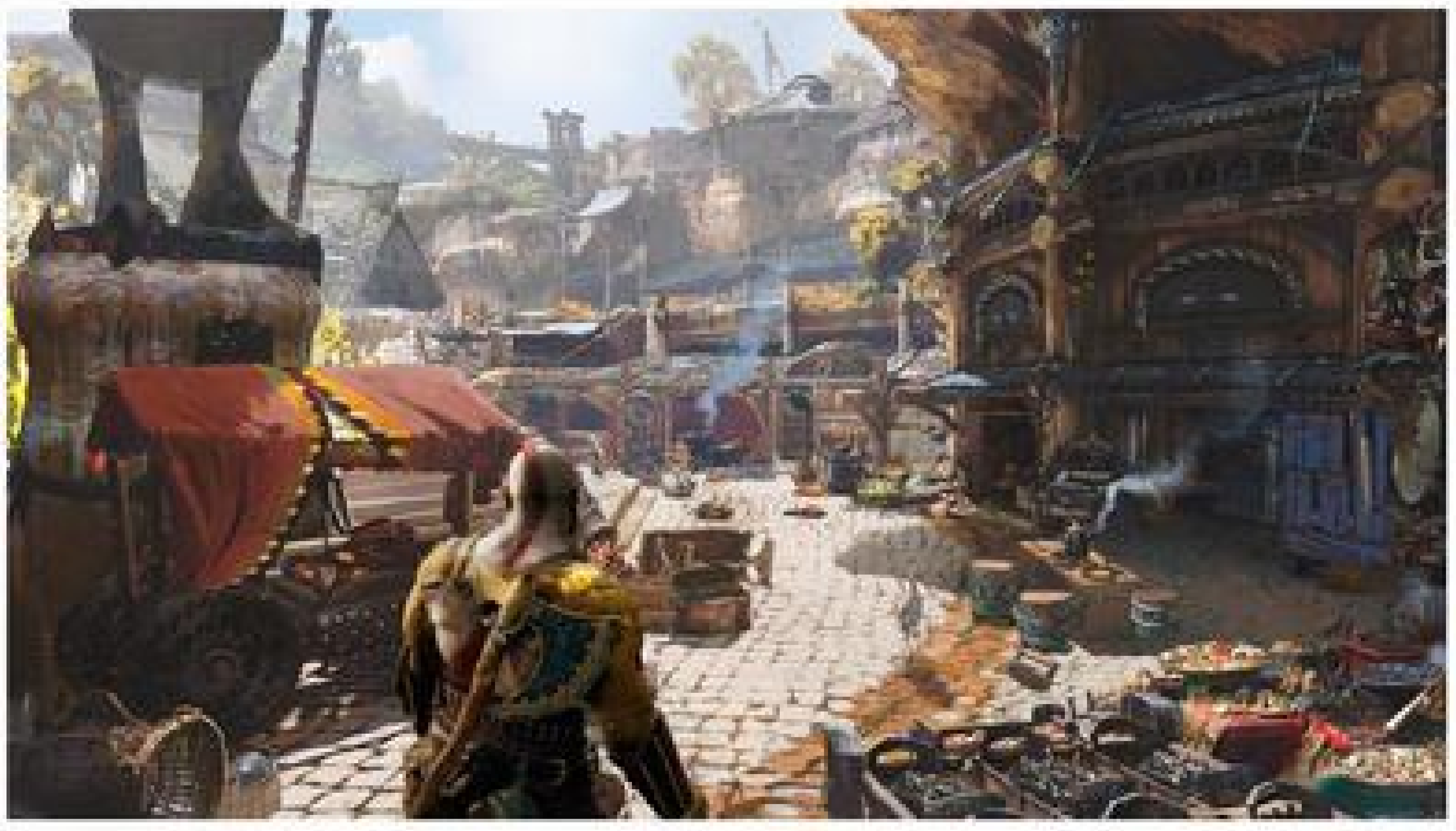


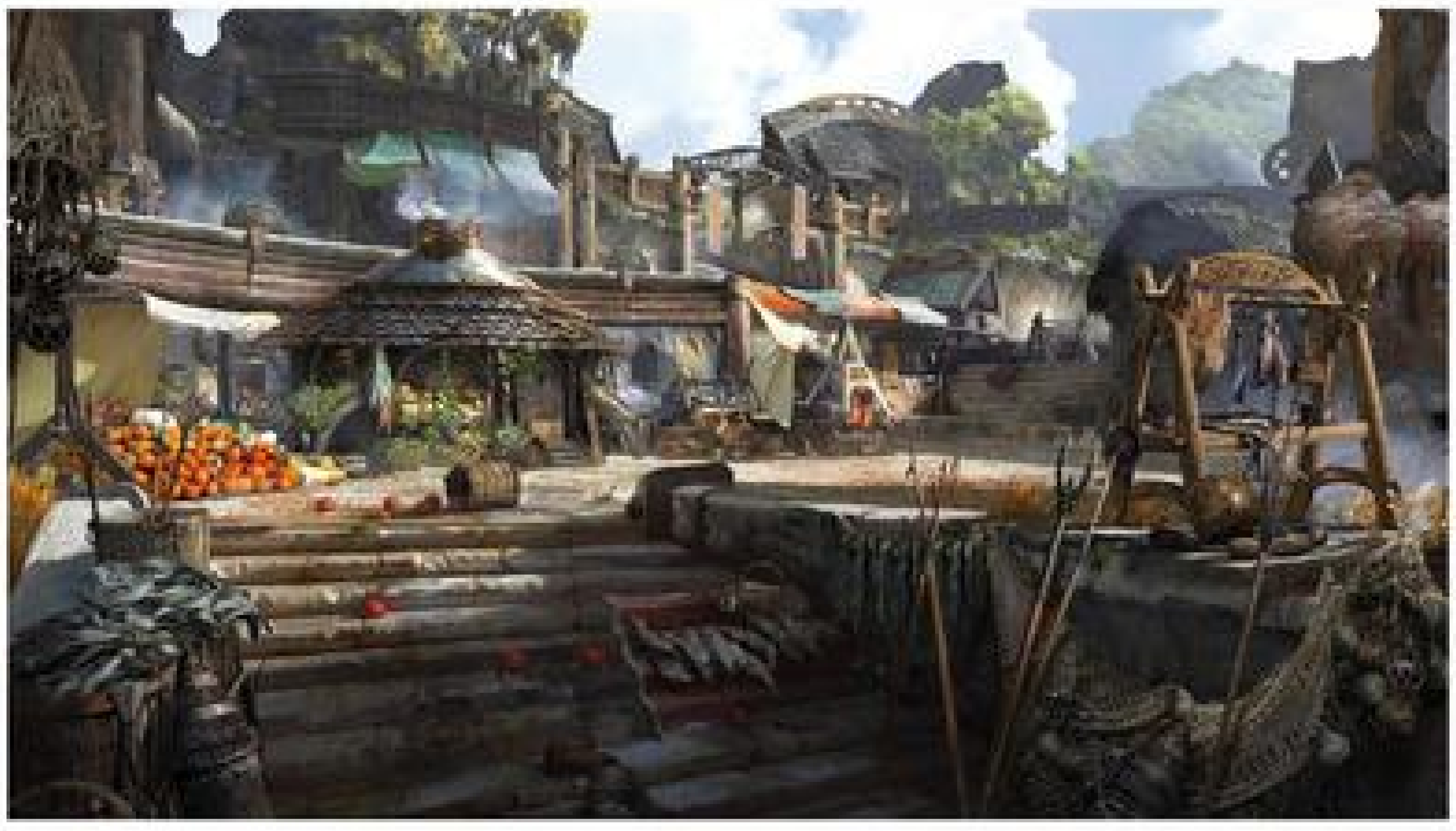
The realm gliders are the winged beasts the Einherjar can ride into battle. Besides seeing the realm gliders harnessed as beasts of burden, the artists wanted to show a wilder, untamed version of flying creatures. Yefim Kligerman pulled from the elements of Vanaheim to add brightly colored feathers and pushed more elegant and ornate shapes to reflect their natural environment.

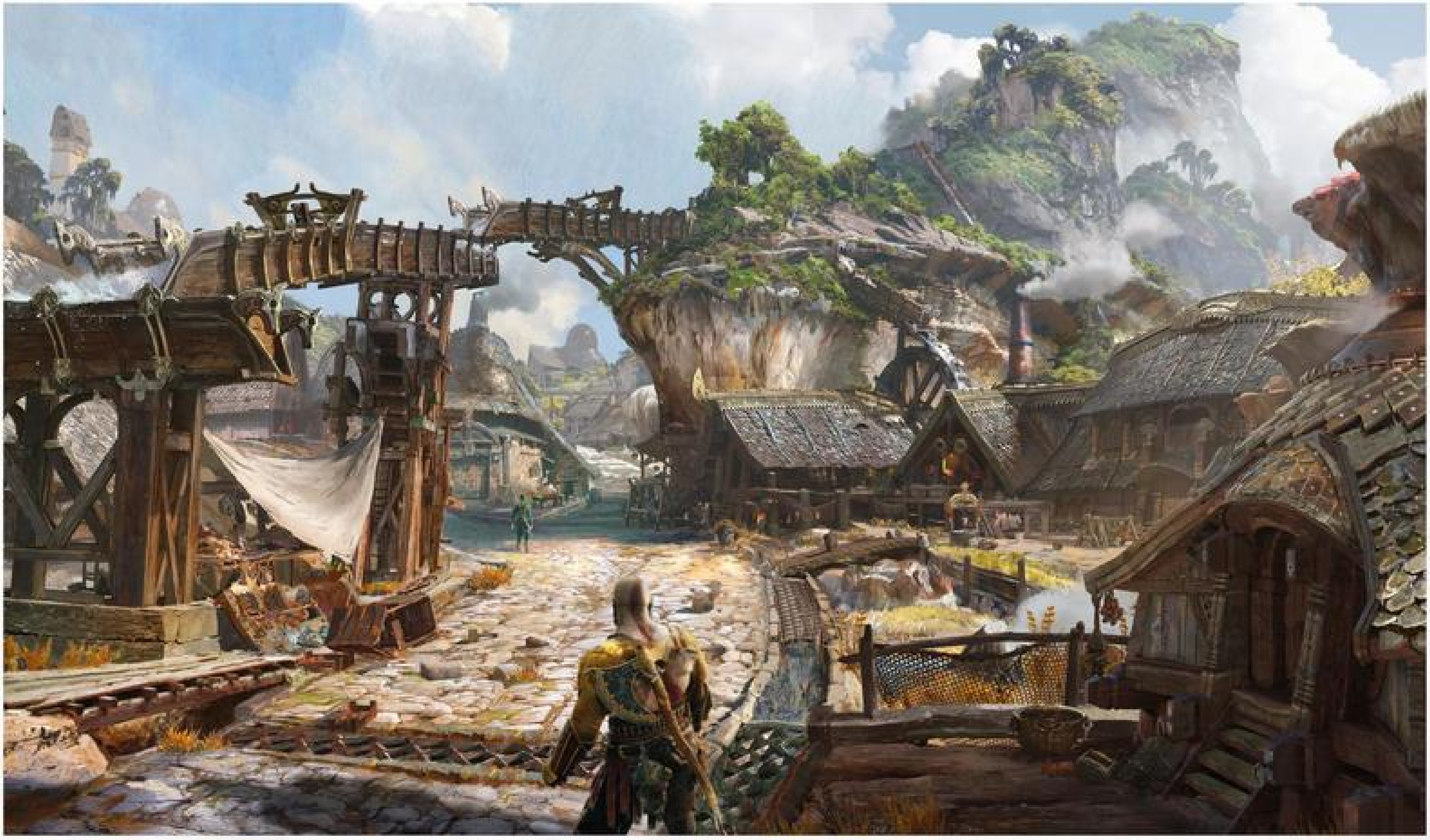
Svartalfheim's colorful market. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio



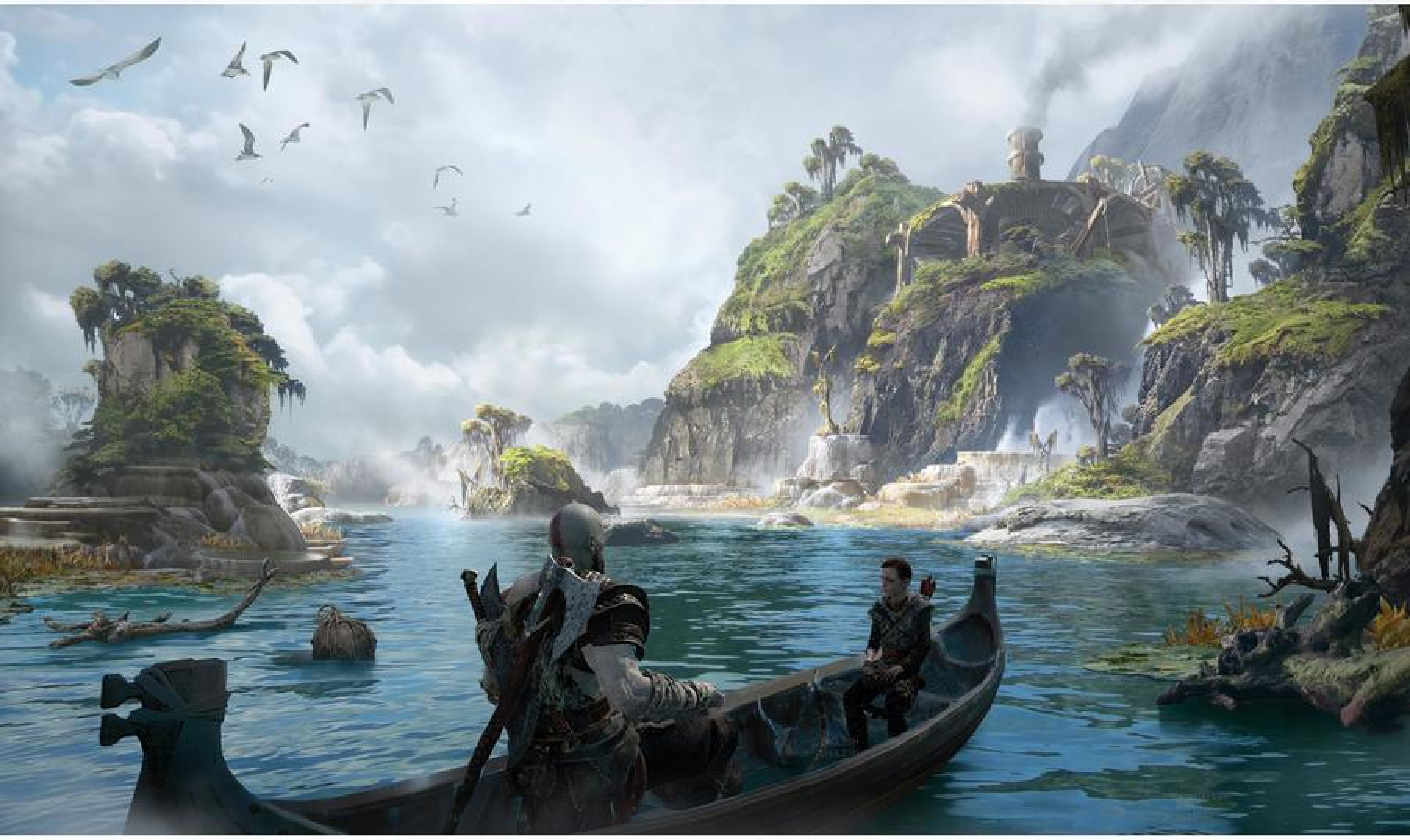
The marketplace sits at the town's heart and shows the vibrant colors of the vendors and the merchandise that is traded in the area. Environment concept artist Norris Lin said, "We also emphasized coastal elements and pushed that fish-market vibe, since this is an area where seafood is the most approachable diet. The aqueduct is an interesting feature in the scene. We wanted to show a Dwarf's advanced engineering ability to use the system to acquire water and power from the mountain."

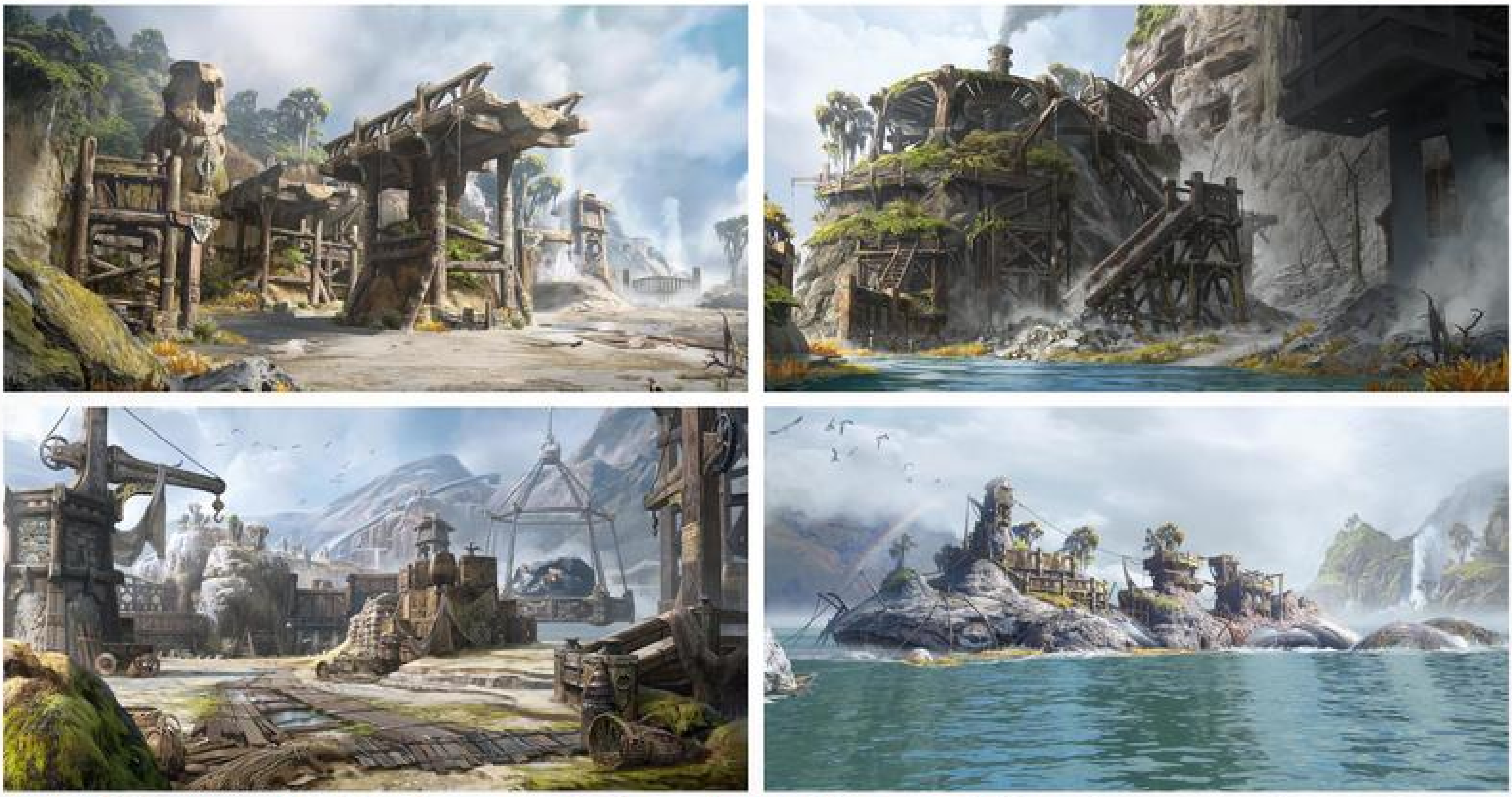






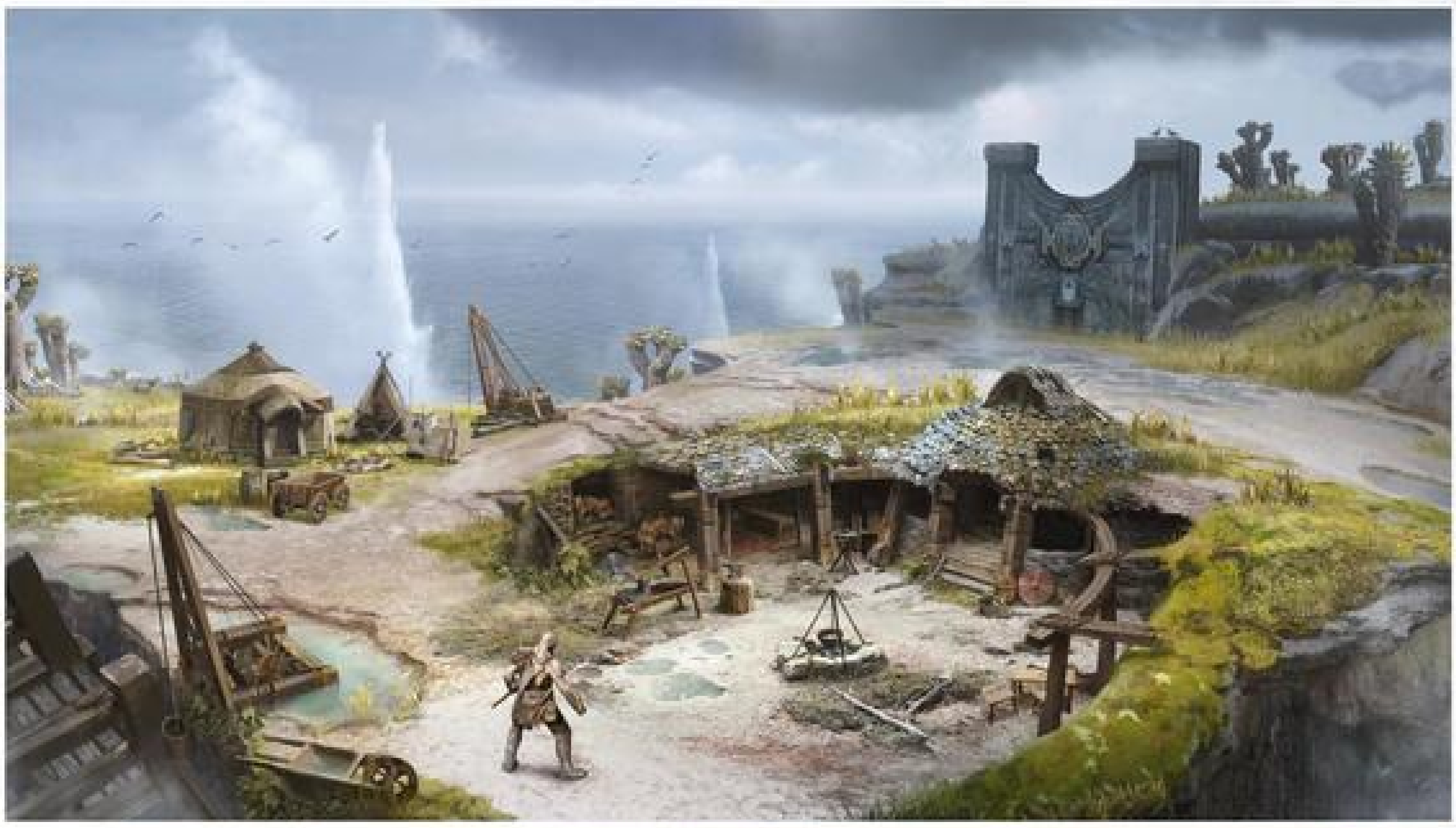
Svartalfheim's North Bay concepts. Artist: Norris Lin

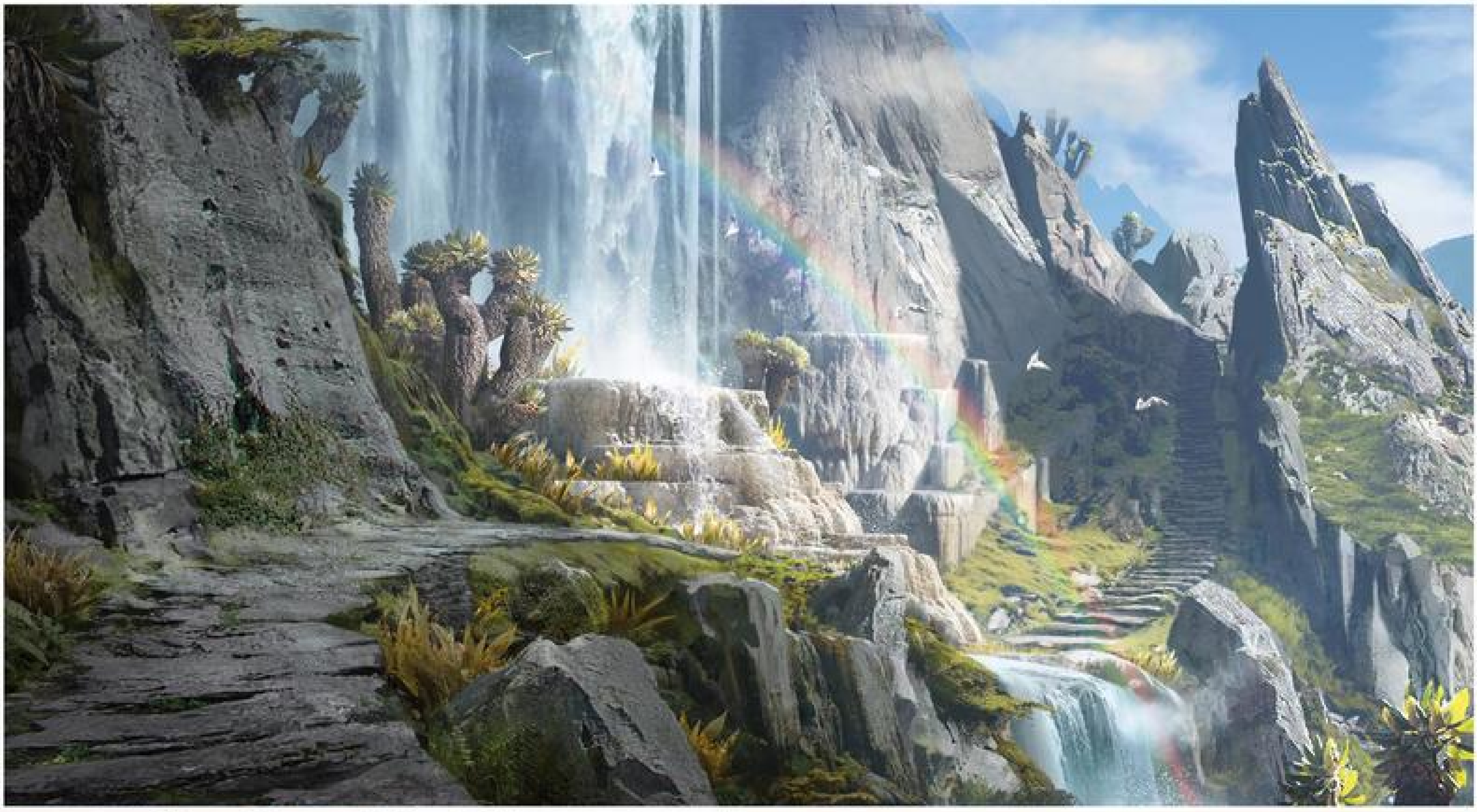


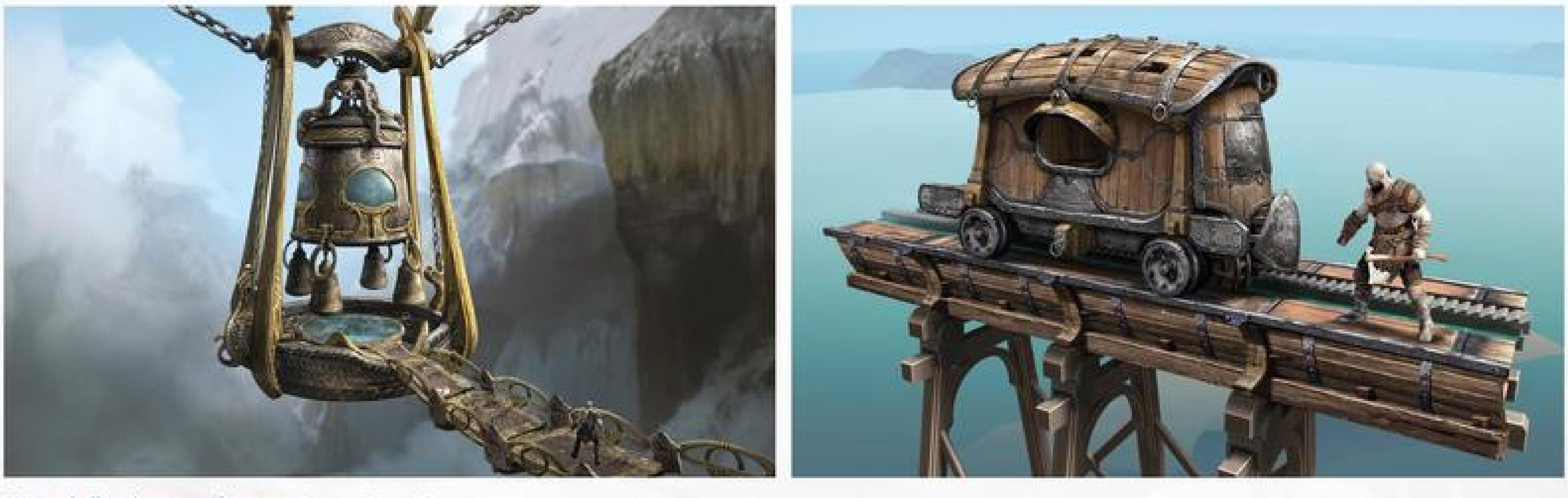


Water and lush trees surround North Bay. Vancouver Island, with its small, scattered isles, inspired this habitat. Players can navigate a boat around the area and explore the area's ecosystem. Lin said, "Each island features layered mining rigs full of surprises and treasures for you to discover. However, you need to be cautious at all times, because you are not welcome among those dangerous creatures."

These pieces show the route to the forge with breathtaking views from high altitudes. Lin explained, "Campsites are found along the path for people who try to ascend to the mountaintop to have their creations blessed. There are two methods of transportation you will find on the way with different aesthetics. The train has a more practical design with the minimal decoration commonly used by Dwarves. Whereas the diving bell is a more ornate design with a lot of decoration."

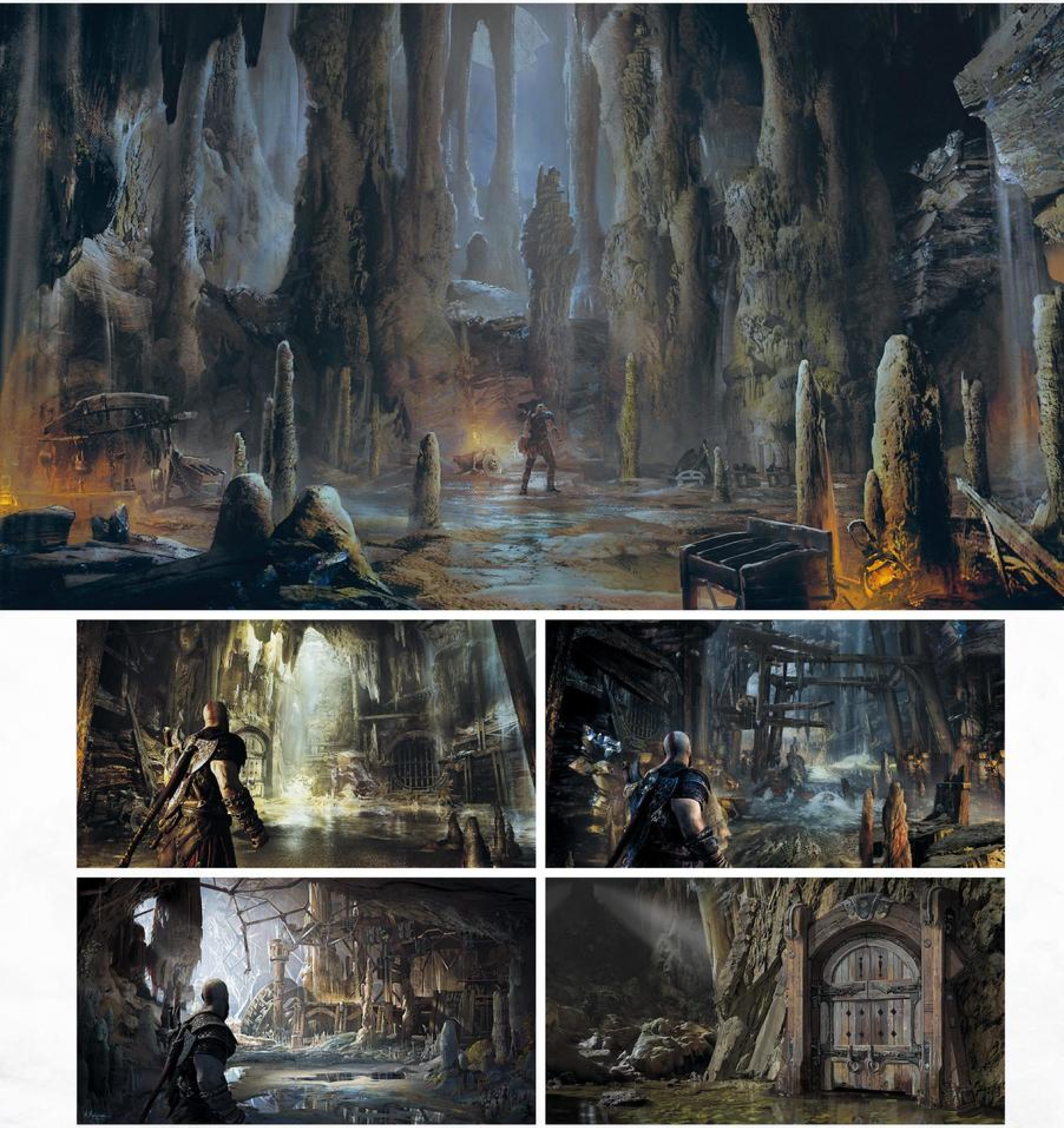






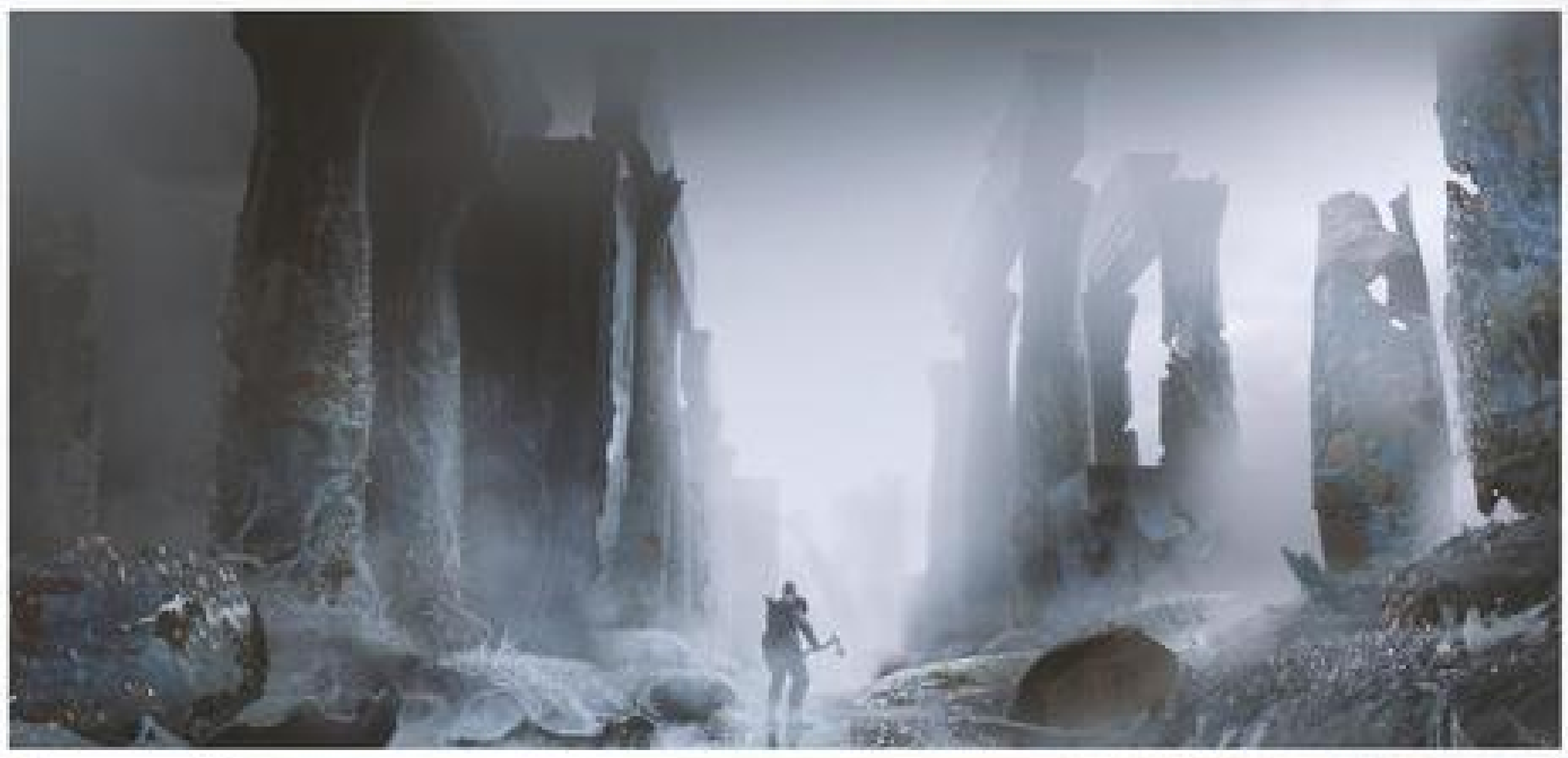
Diving bell and train explorations. Artist: Norris Lin

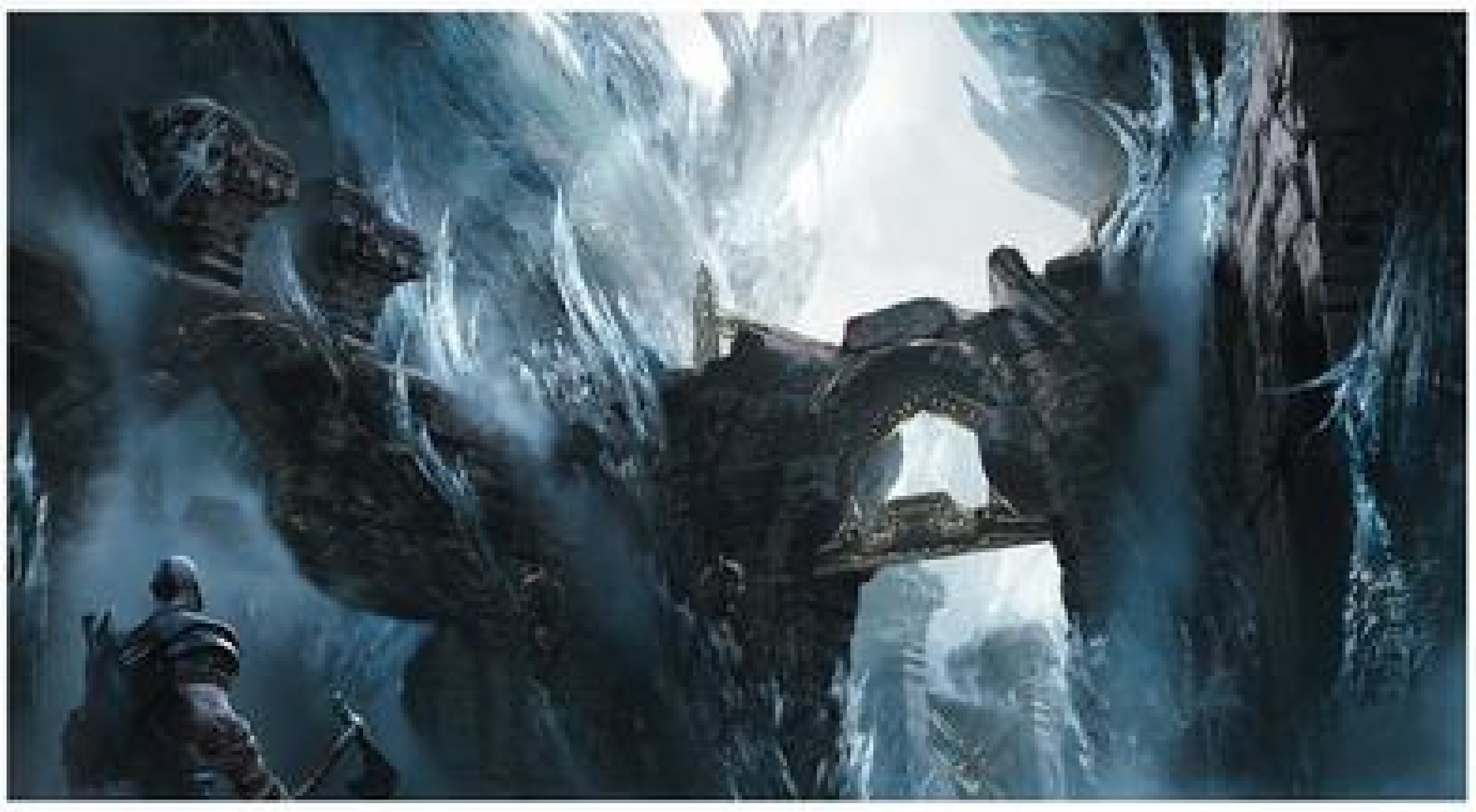
Inside the Applecore mine. Artists: Ryan Hong (top and middle); Matteo Marjoram (bottom)

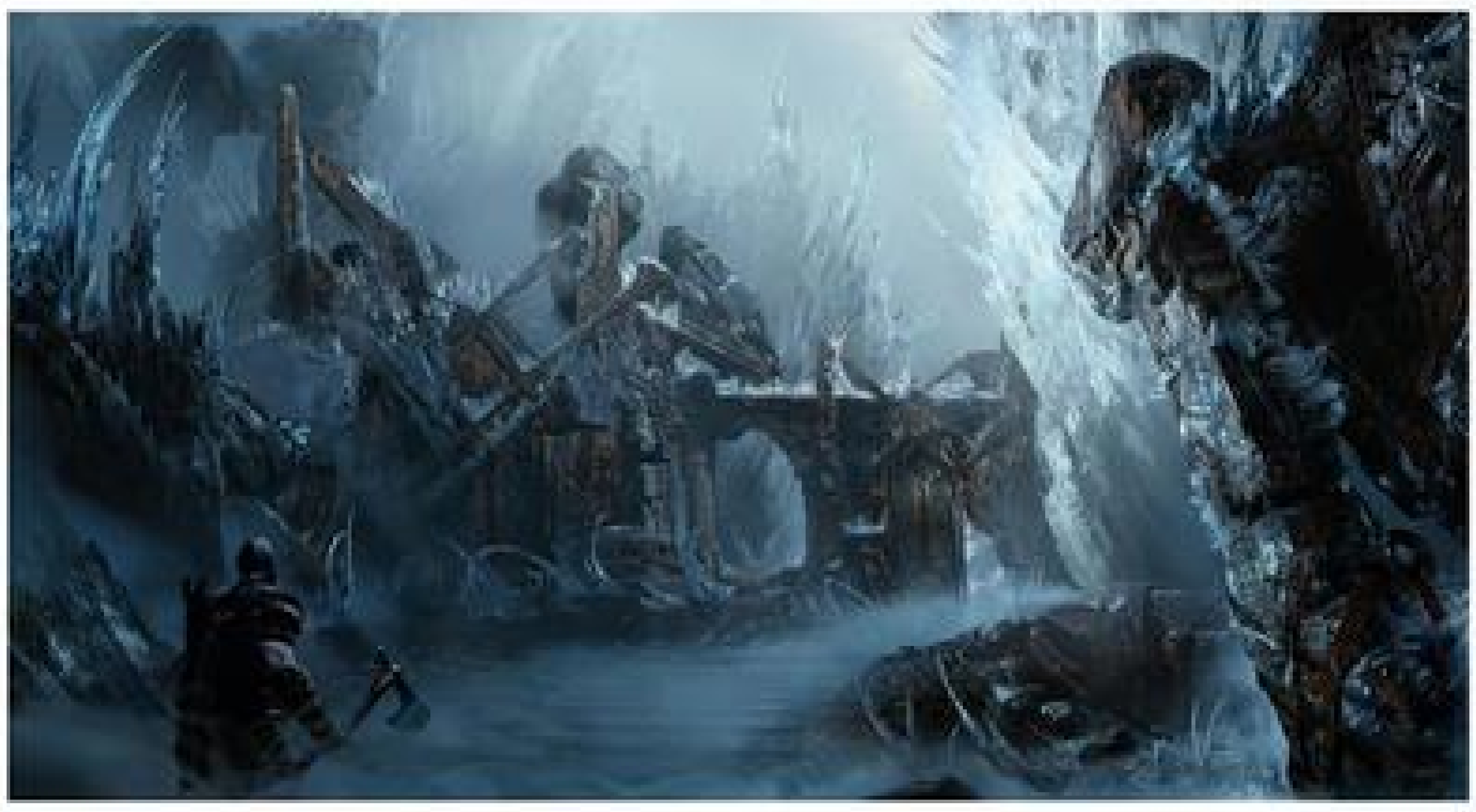


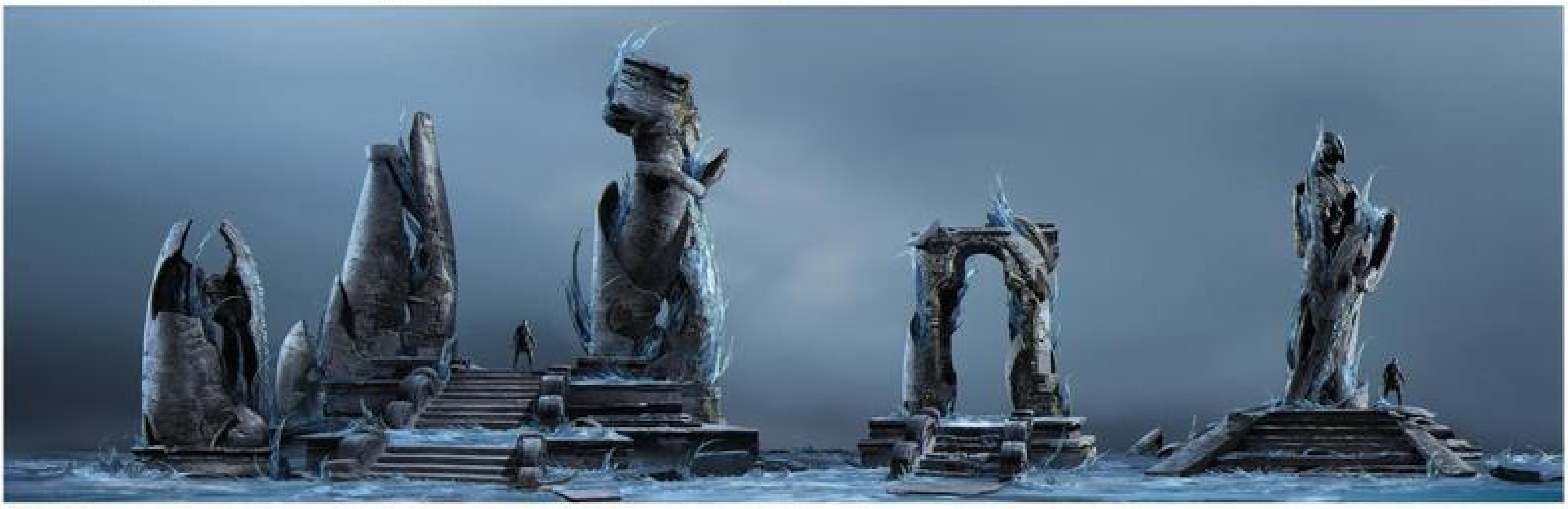
In the underground mining area of Applecore, the team considered elements of a natural cave versus manmade structures. They wanted a good balance of how the artificial aspects would fit into that natural environment. "We used the natural stalactite form as a base and figured out a way to construct wooden structures on top of it and make sure everything is working nicely with each other," Lin said.

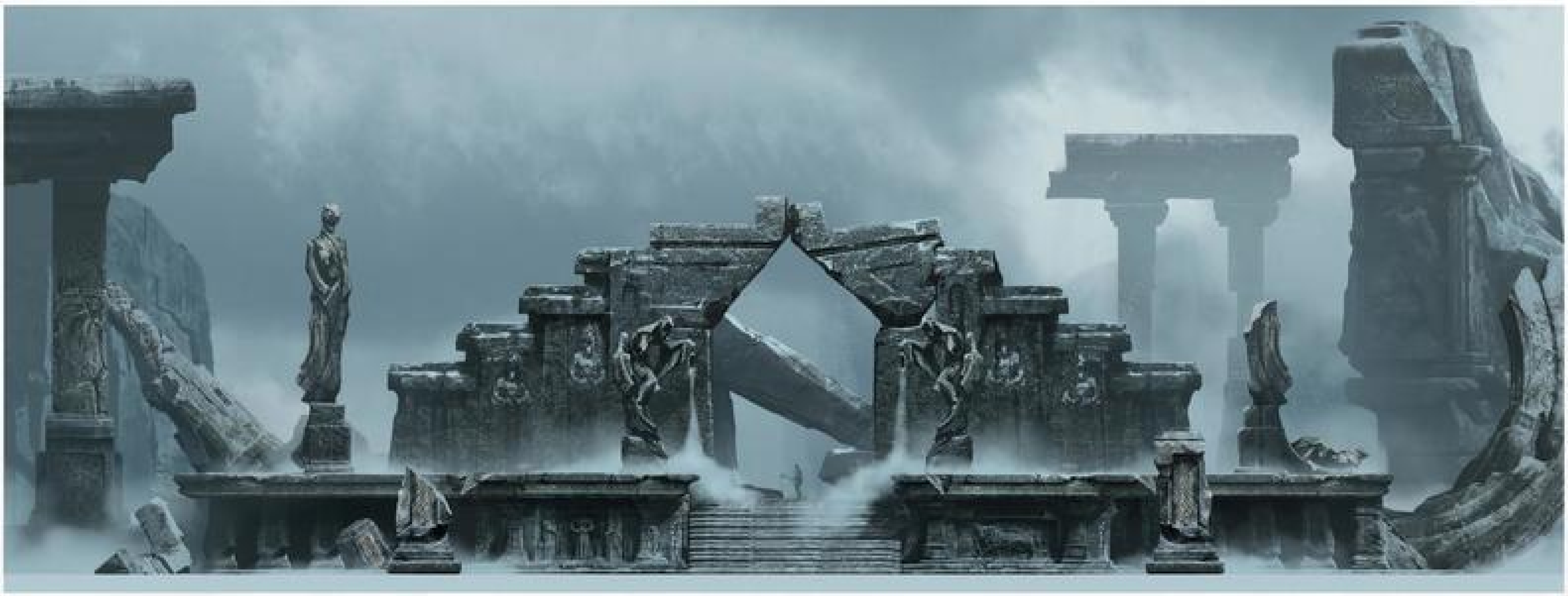
Niflheim is a mysterious realm of icy, sharp forms. The artists wanted to push the misty, obscured feeling to the extreme. However, they also wanted ancient architectural ruins reaching into the sky through the mist. They combined those towering ruins with curved ice elements. "In some of the earlier concepts we also explored ideas of broken pottery in which you could see the hollow empty space inside to create more visual interest," Lin said.





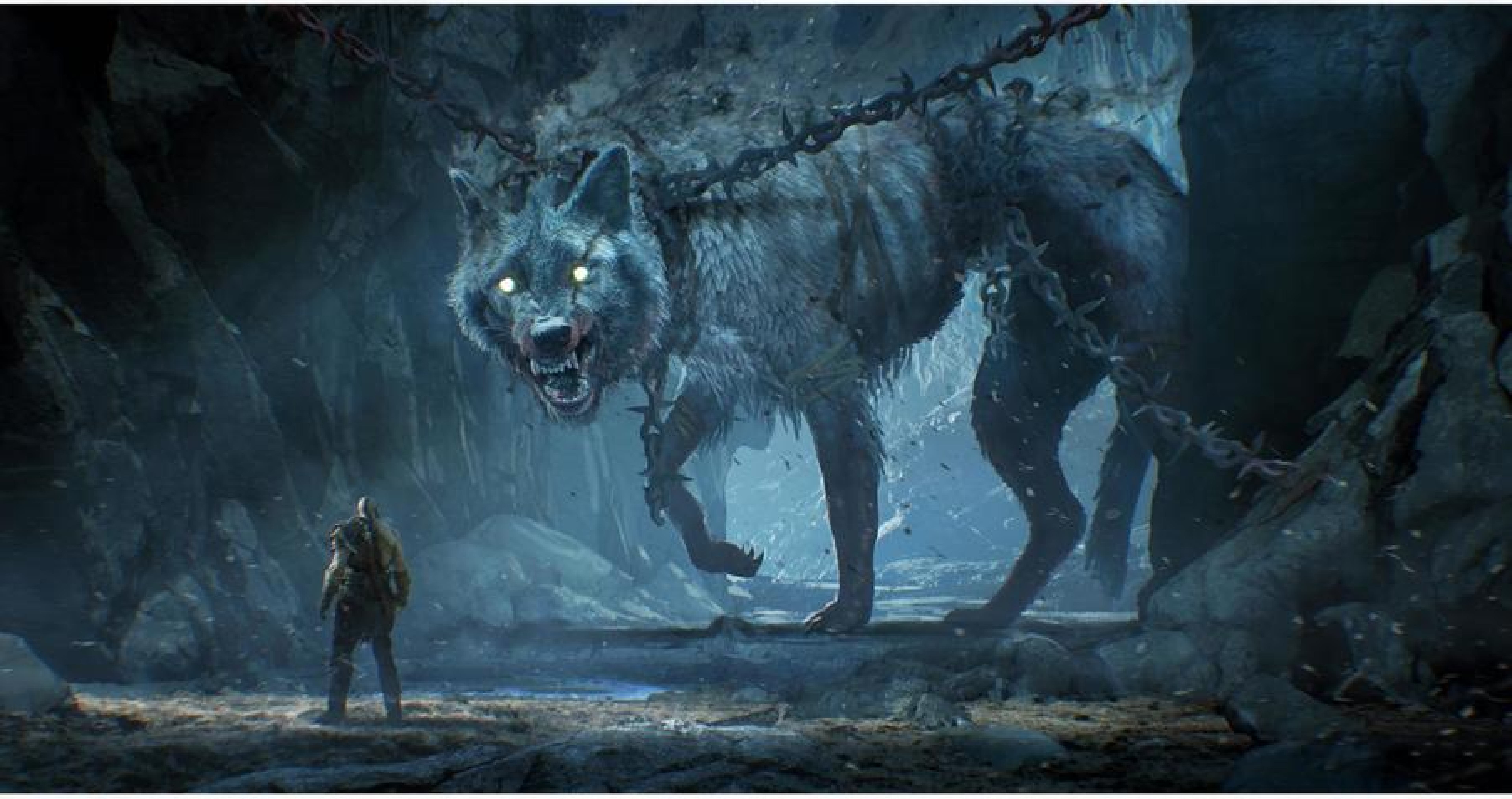


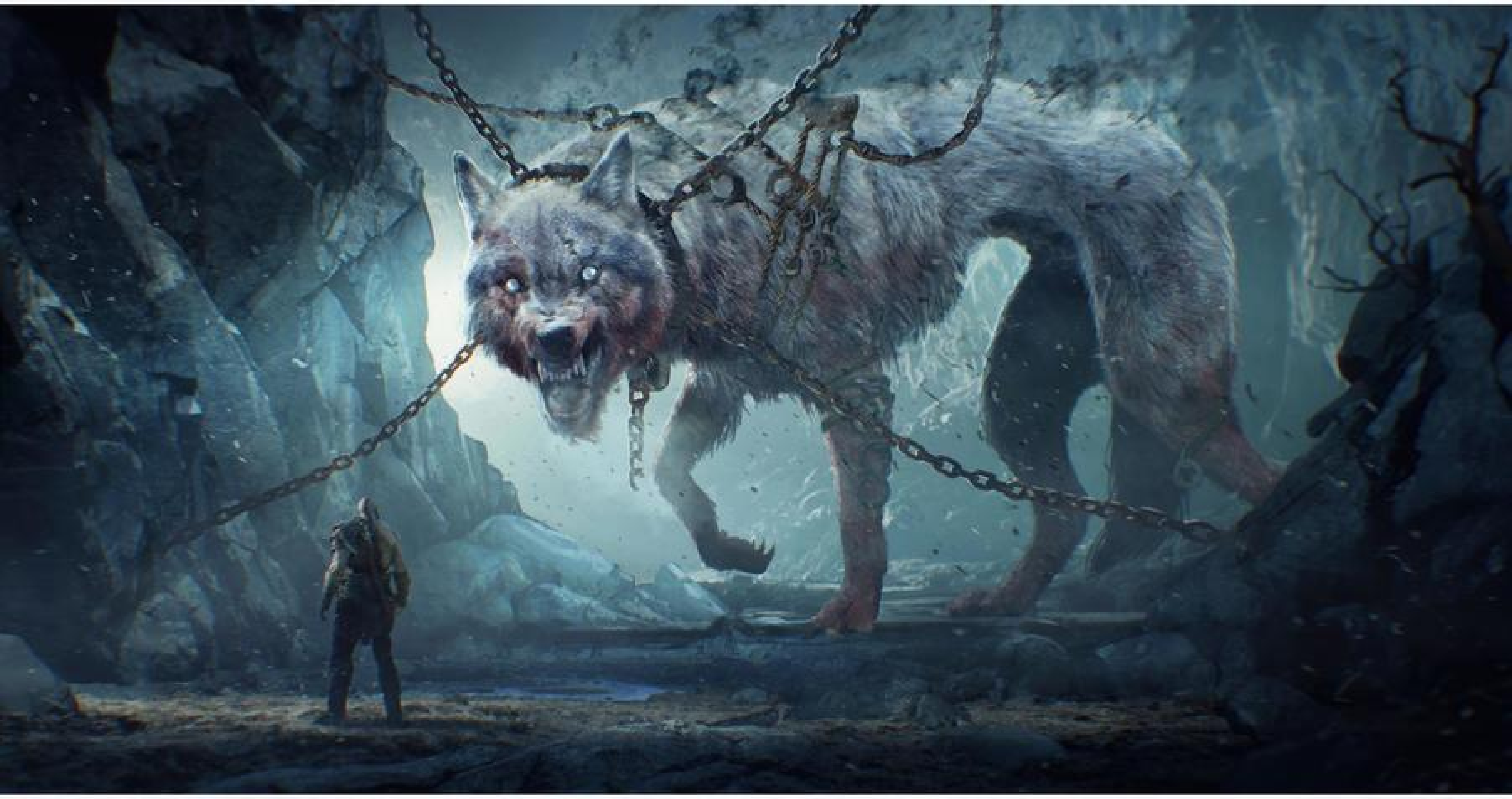




Niflheim's architectural ruins. Artists: Luke Berliner (top); Abe Taraky (middle); Norris Lin (bottom)

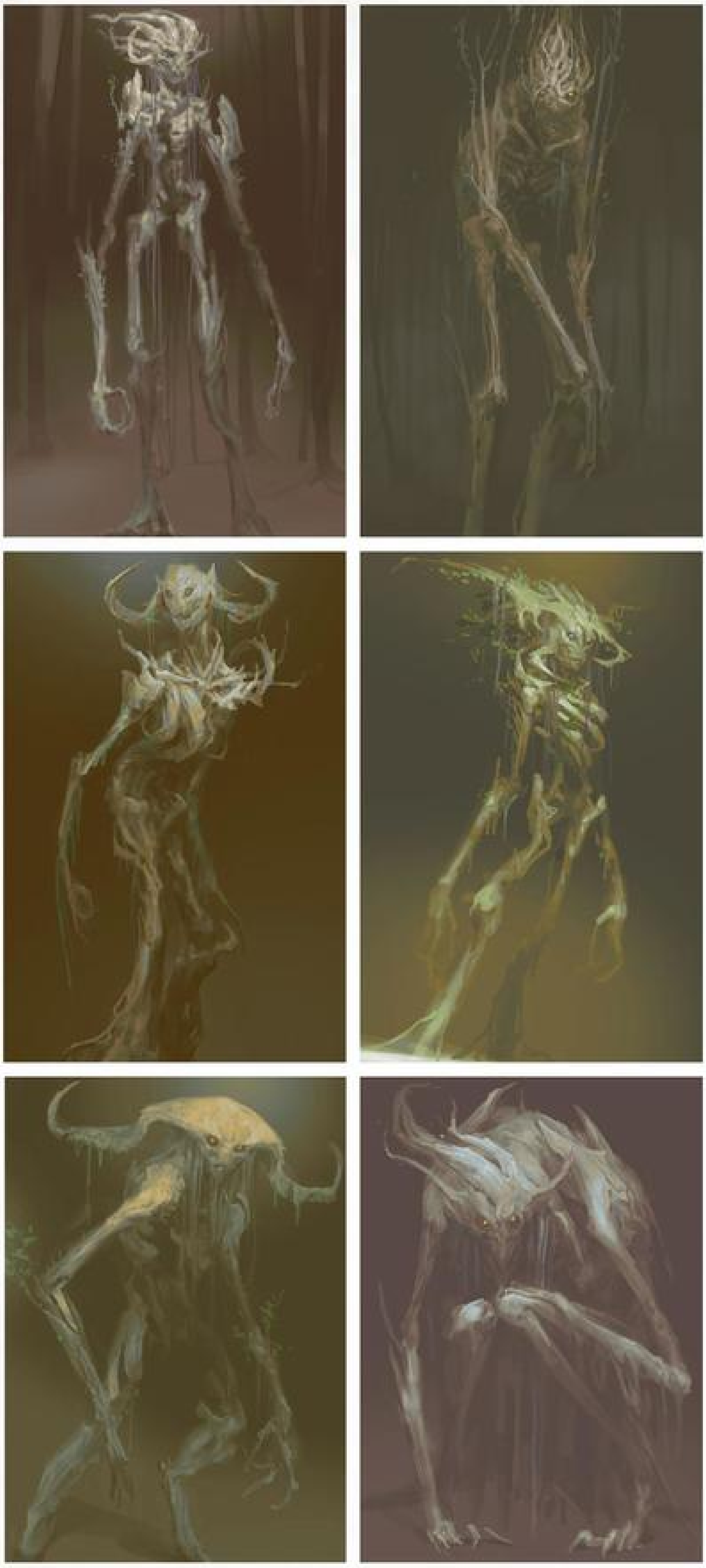
Garm, the guardian of Hel. Artist: Karl Lindberg

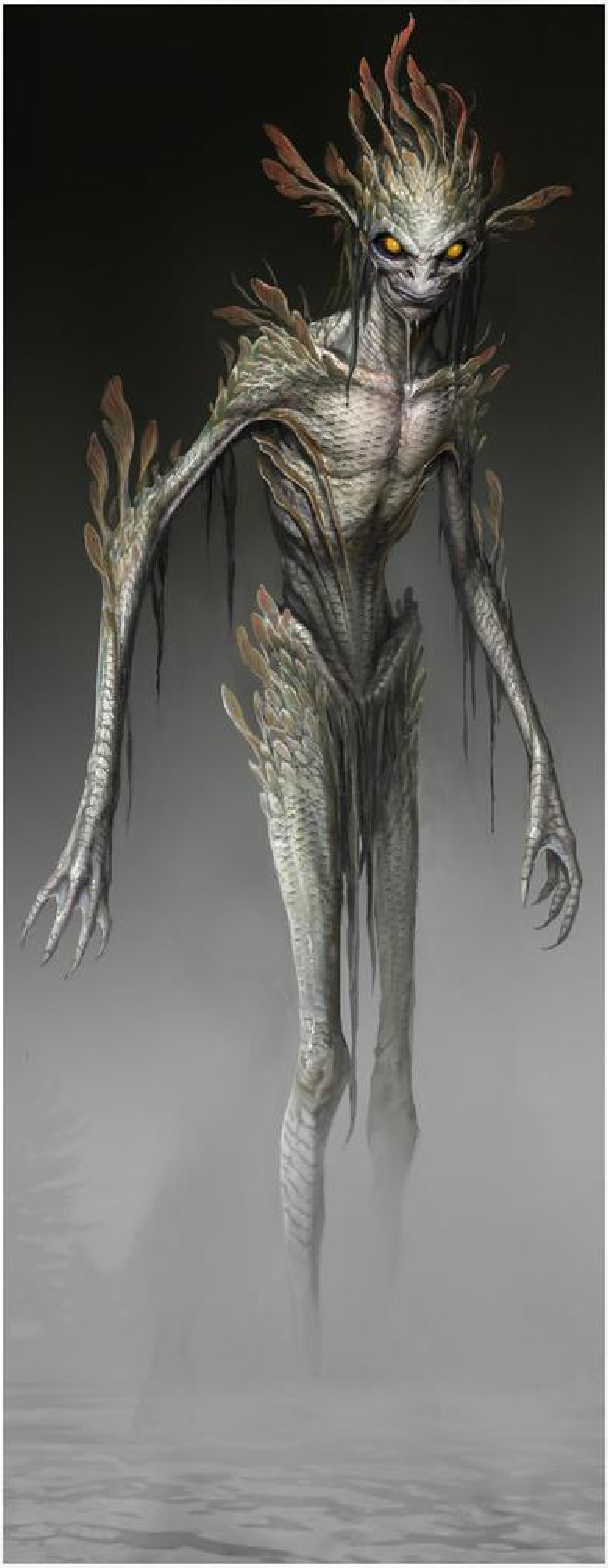




"Making a wolf befitting of the guardian of Hel took some thought," Oakley said. "Their design ranged from the truly horrific to exaggerated high-fantasy looks. Everything from their harness to the chains had to reinforce the scale and ferocity of this beast. We always look to our design pillars to pull the look toward final. Those pillars, coupled with the story needs, brought Garm to the feral, emaciated but no less imposing guardian they are now."

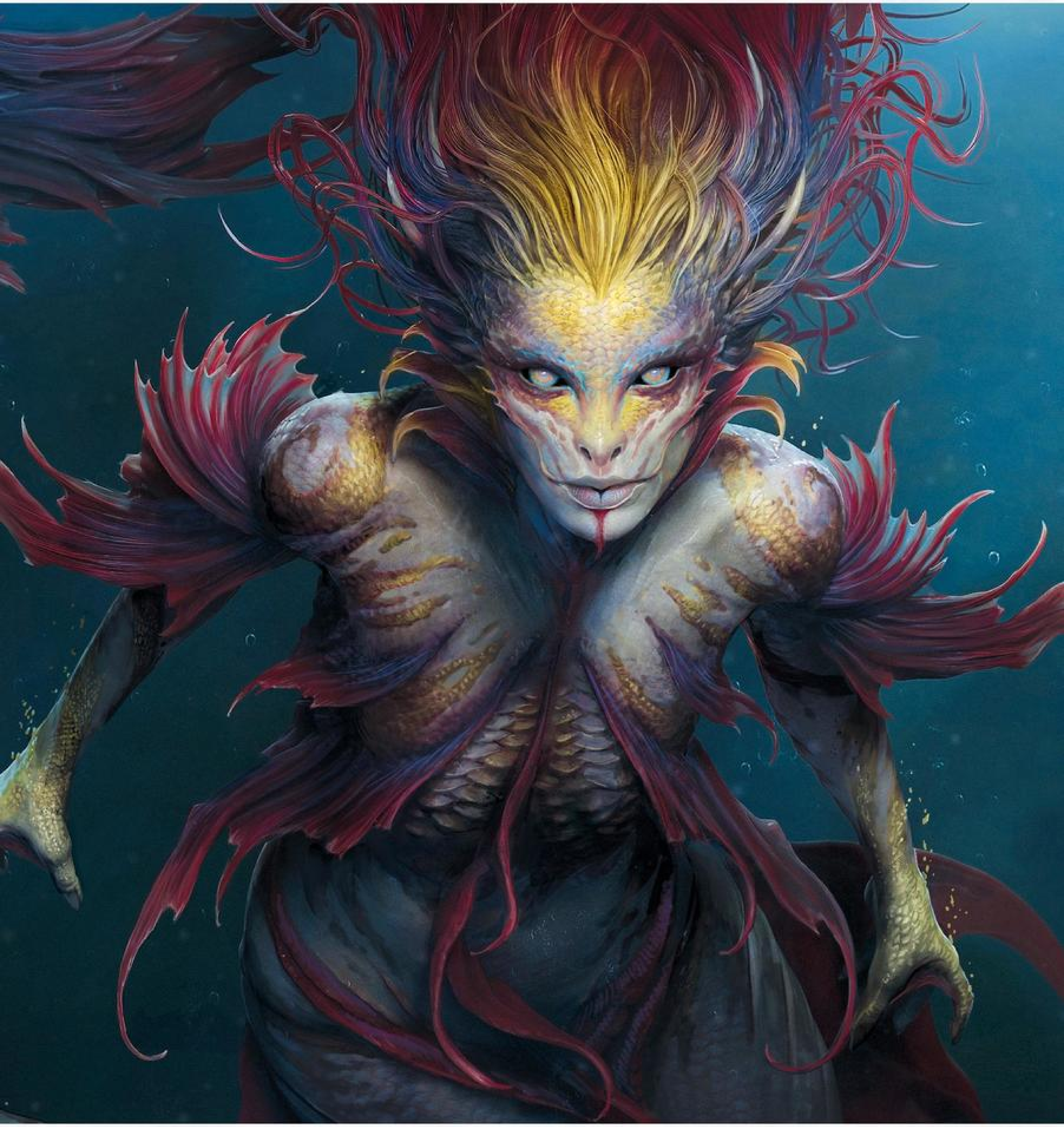
Rangy Nokken concepts. Artists: Bjorn Hurri (Opus Artz) (left); Shan Qiao (right)





The Nokkens are mischievous water spirits. Bjorn Hurri's initial concepts imagined them as small, spindly, twisted, and contorted characters. What looks knotted when the Nokkens stand still lengthens and flows when they move through water—especially their elongated limbs. Hurri pulled from their connection to water to give them a natural and aquatic look. Even the dripping moss eventually became part of their actual anatomy in their final design.

Final mermaid concept. Artists: Shan Qiao, Rafael Grassetti



Qiao said, "The mermaid presents such a special cinematic moment; our aim was to really push the fantastical feeling and eye-popping visual. The initial character concept sculpt by Raf already had such beautiful shape and structure. Inspired by real-life underwater creatures, I applied the color from nature to this character to make her palette vibrate. The golden scale idea tied in with her story perfectly."

Artist: Abe Taraky

III

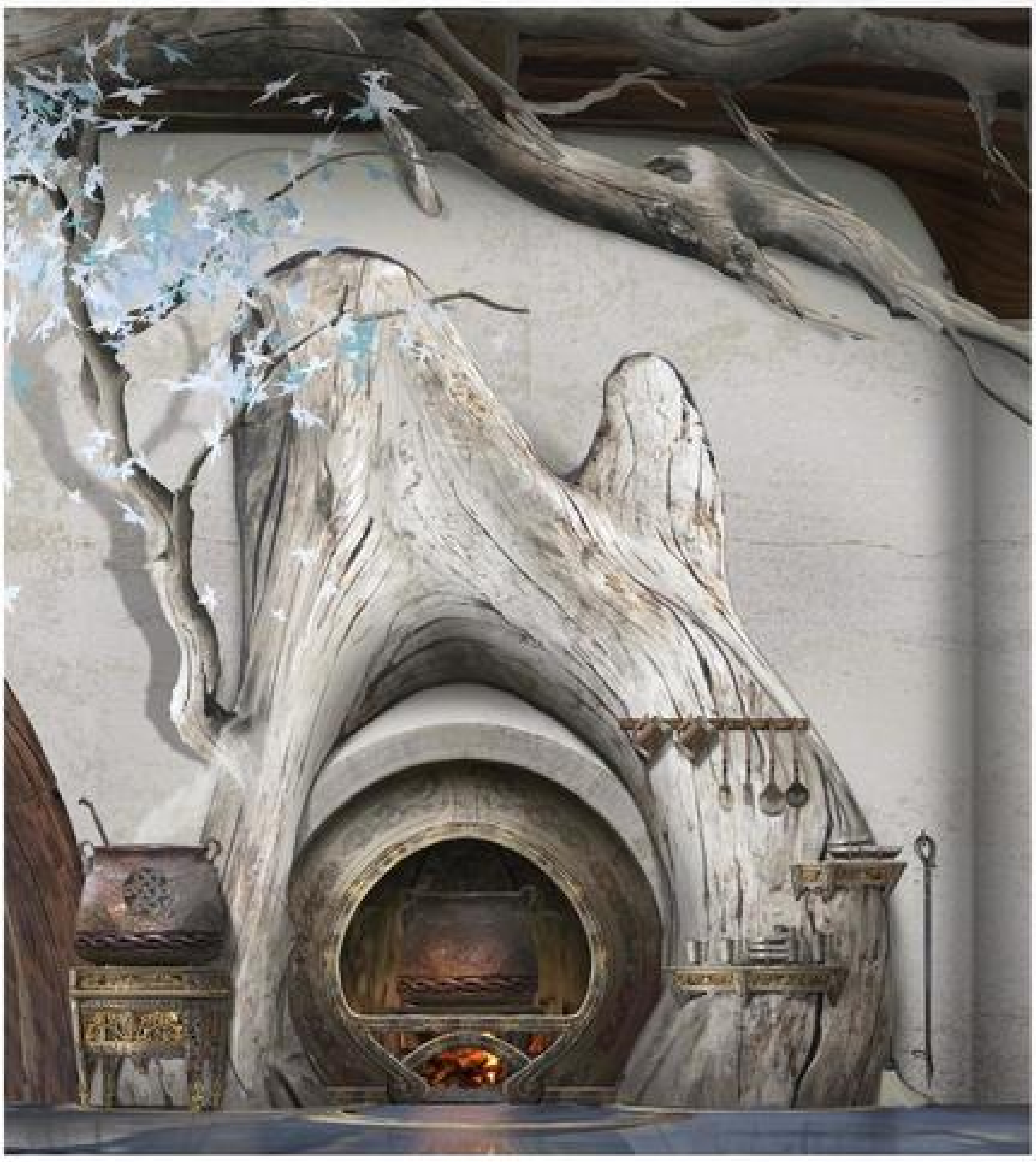
RAGNARÖK

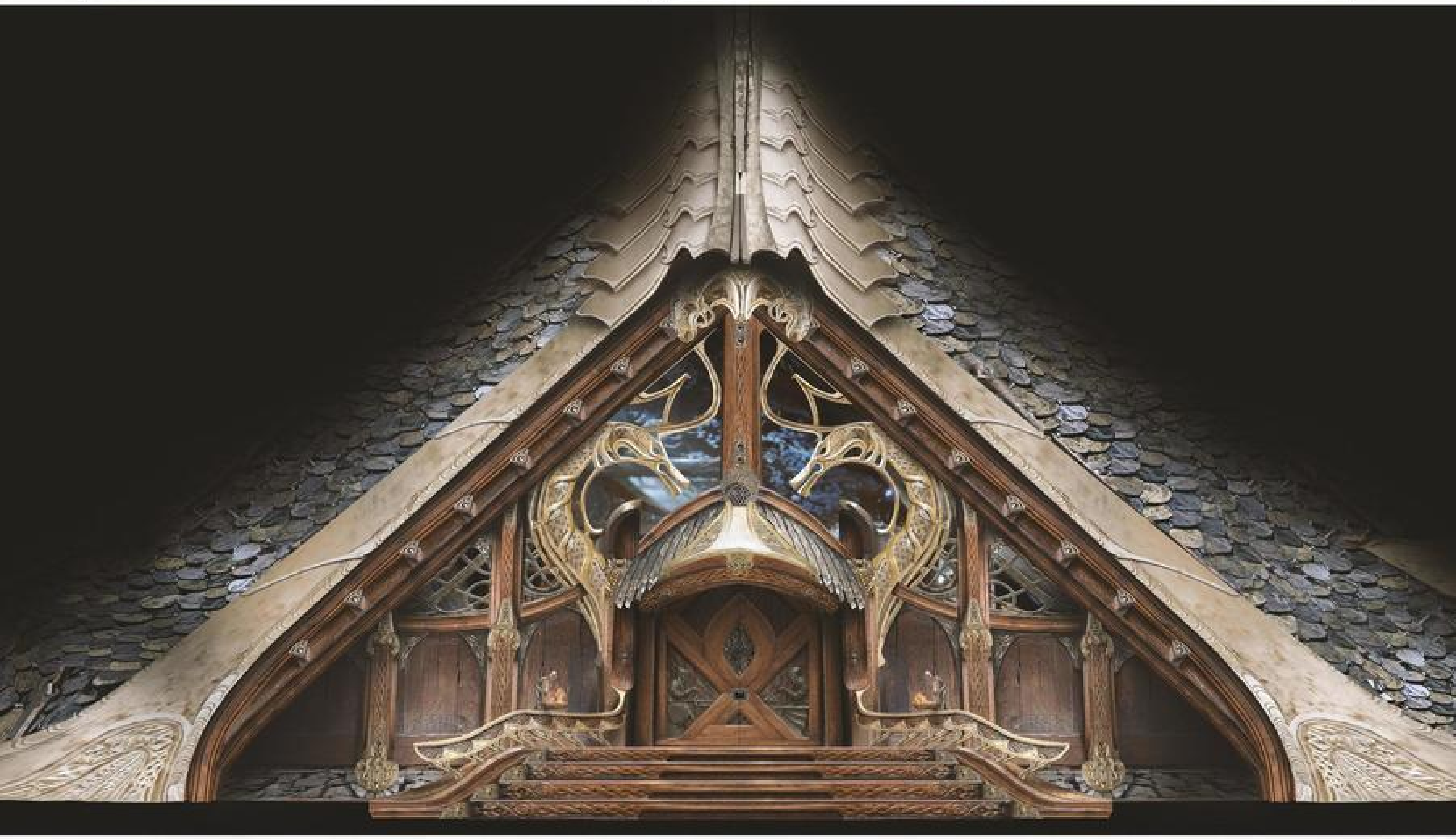
In a game with nine realms, all designed to minute detail, one hurdle artists faced was not getting trapped in a single space. As development continued, they strove to keep a balanced approach to the entire game. Those efforts ensured that every area would receive equal attention, and nothing would have to be developed in a constrained time frame.

They started by tackling the daunting unknowns—anything that scared environment and character artists or engineers. However, with everyone working from home, some big unanswered questions persisted at this point: Were the intent, tone, and mood actually coming through? Was the game coming together the way they wanted?

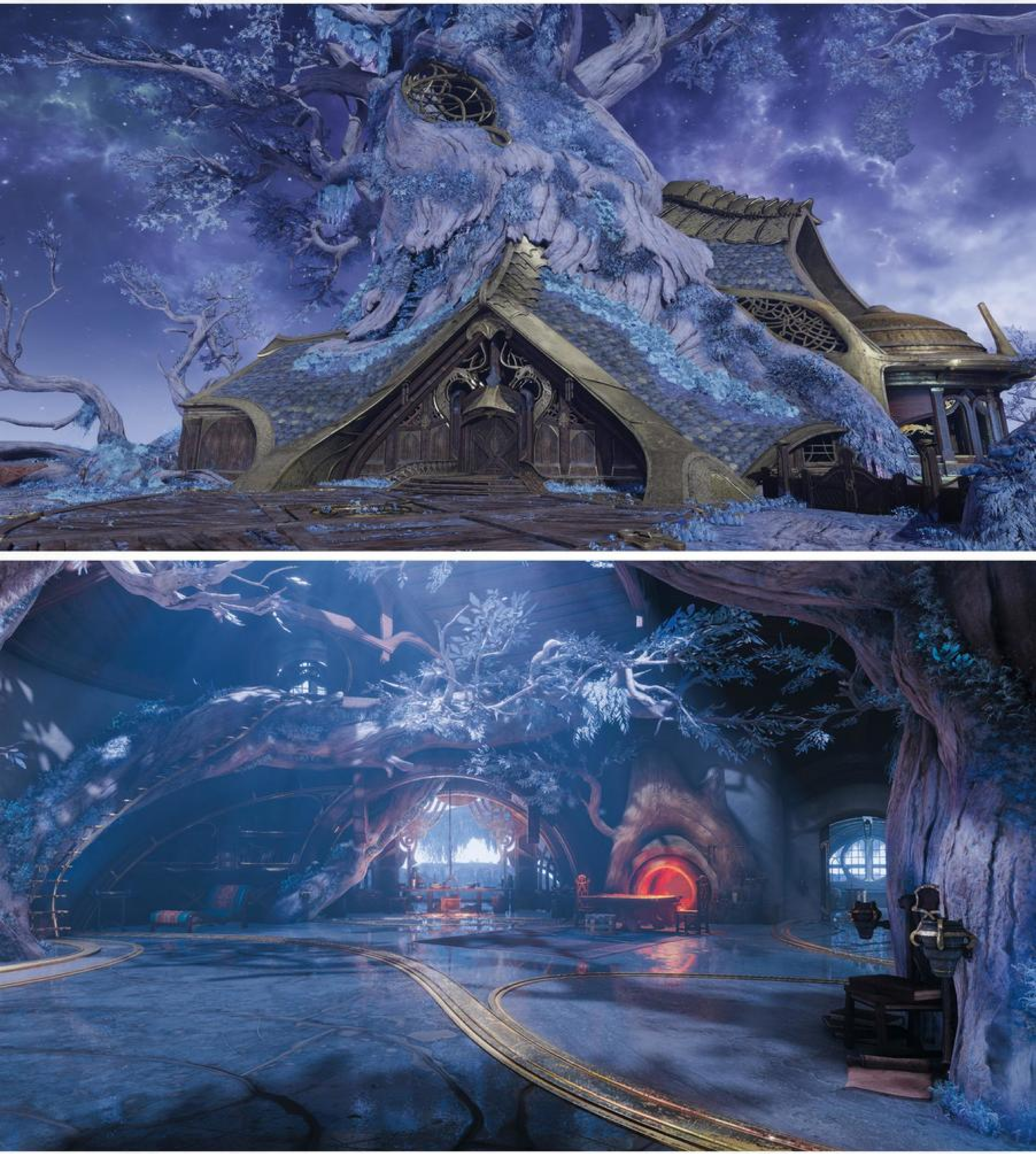
With hundreds of artists working at the same time and hundreds of other team members working on various aspects of the project, it was a game of mutual trust and collaboration. Departments had to focus on their discrete tasks, communicate, and hand off the baton, knowing the next group would move the game forward closer to completion.

"The Realm between Realms was a unique place to bring to life," said artist Ivanna Liittschwager. "The Huldra brothers' craftsmanship is unlike anyone else's. We wanted to create a realm that was tranquil and mystical that fit the brothers' home life. The final result is something never seen before. The home is cozy, beautiful, and shows off the brothers' incredible skill with the hammer and forge."



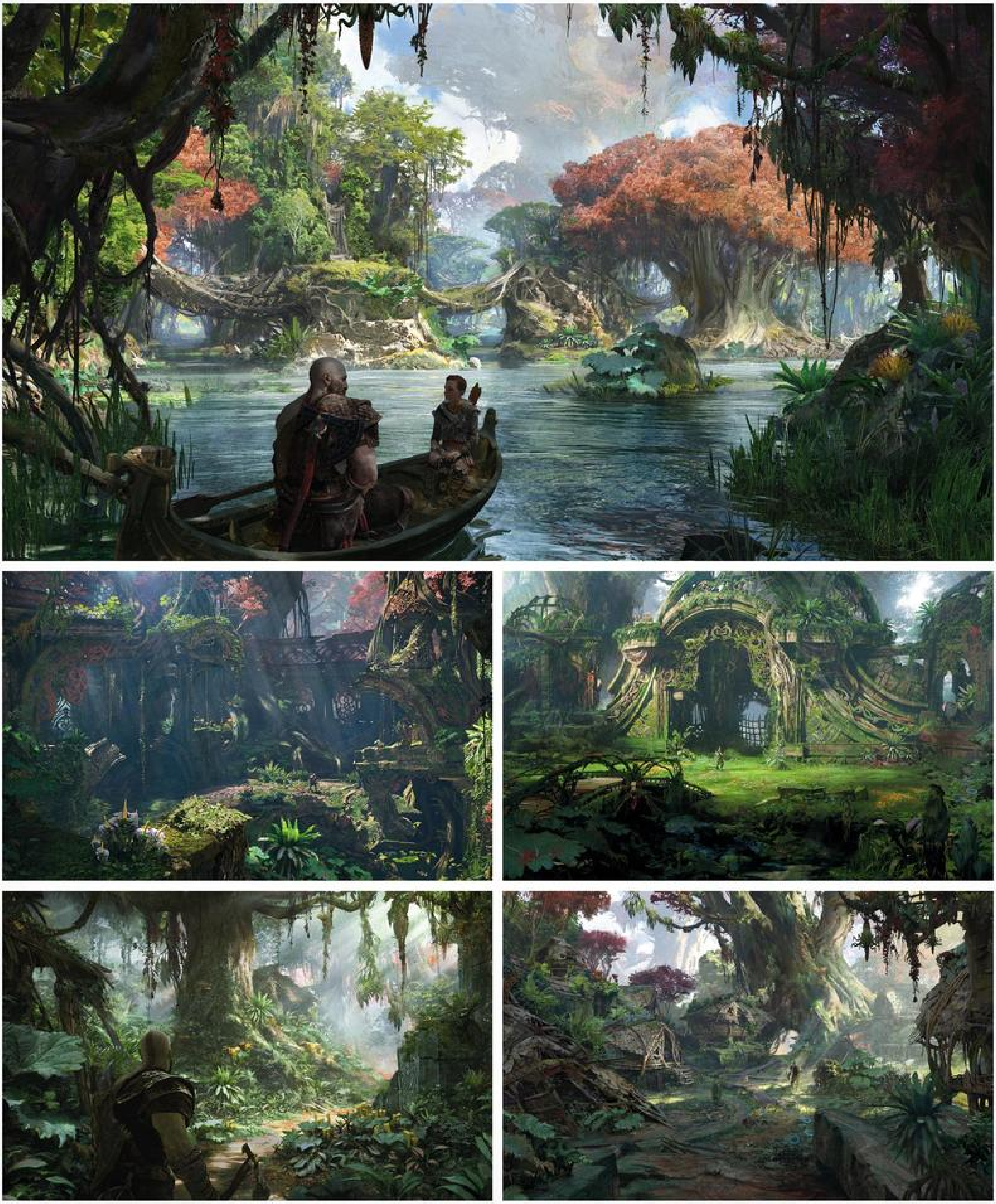


Concepts for the home of the Huldra brothers. Artists: Matteo Marjoram (top); Luke Berliner (bottom)



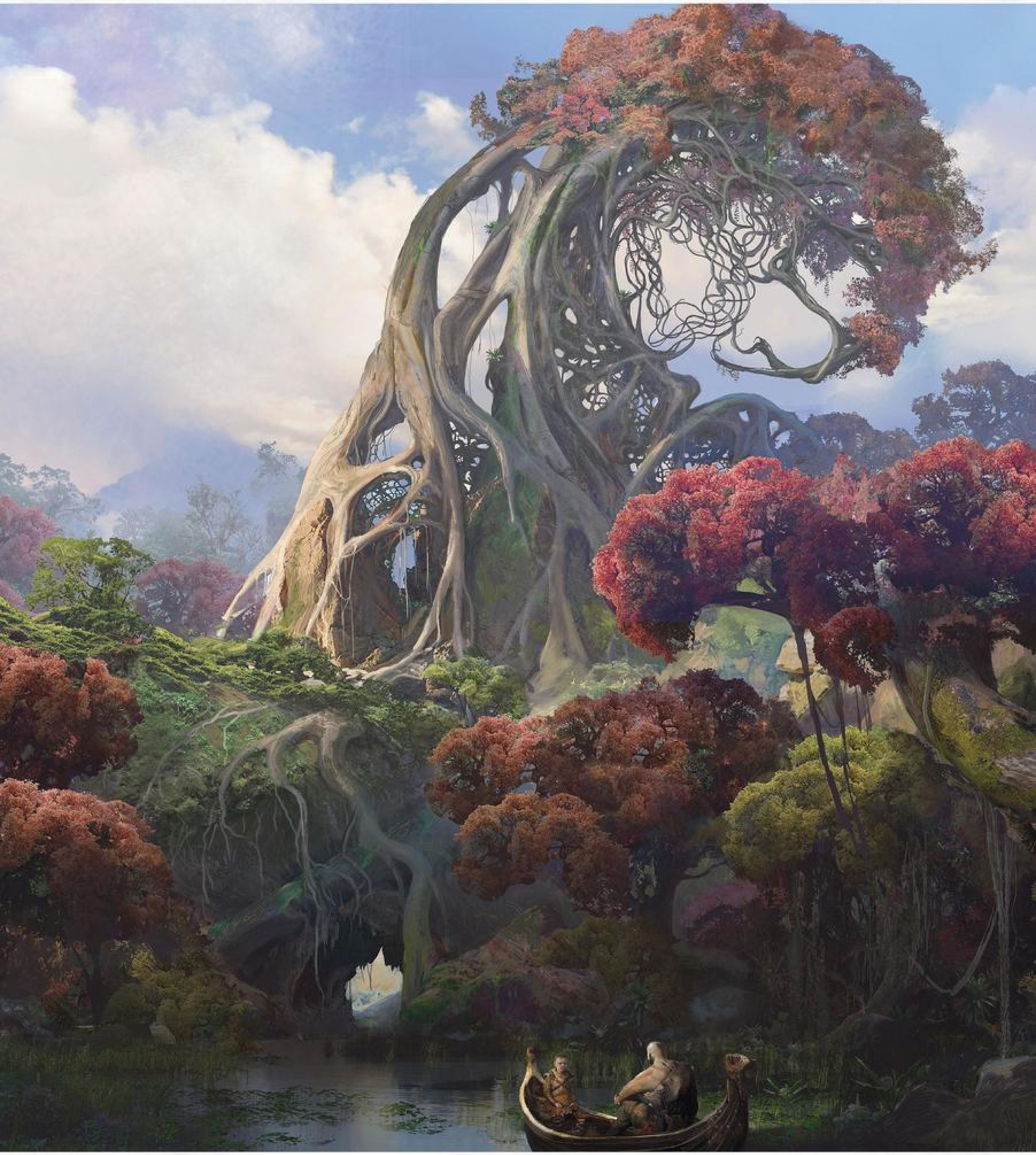
The entrance to the Huldra brothers' home. Artists: Nate Stephens, Ivanna Liittschwager

Vanaheim water village concepts. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio

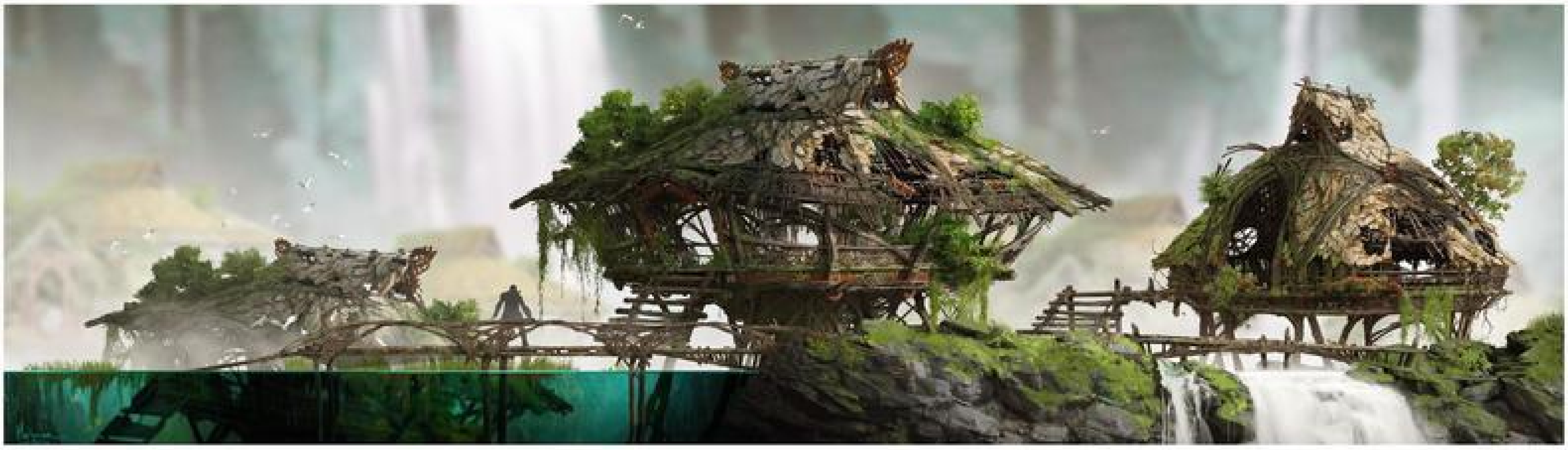


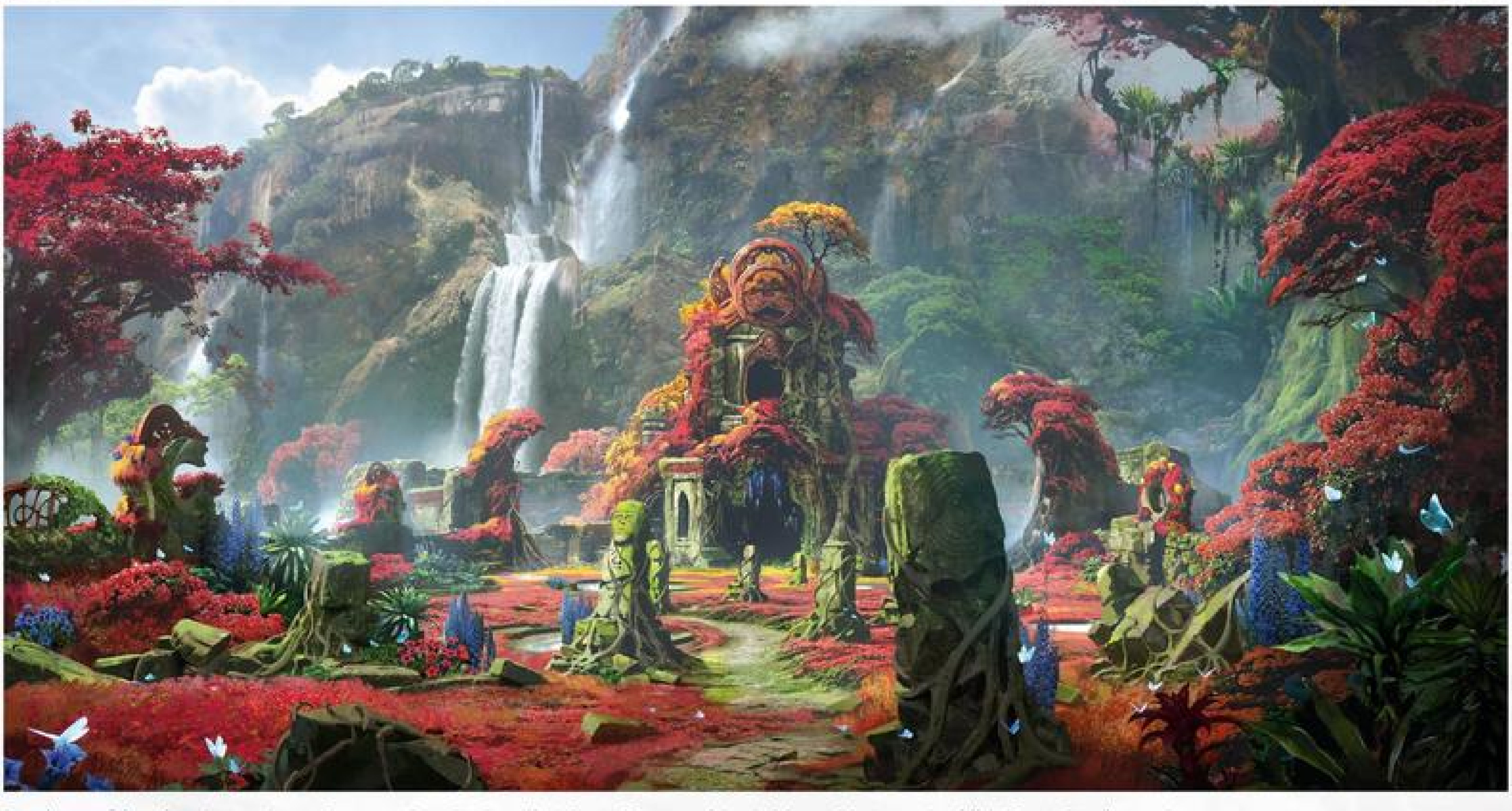
Lead environment artist Dan McKim noted that Vanaheim is one of the largest realms in the game and contains a significant volume of water and foliage and a lot of subsurface scattering. All of these elements create challenges in delivering fidelity, but the team threw in the kitchen sink (featurewise) to ensure these areas perform at maximum quality.

The vegetation of Vanaheim. Artist: KARAKTER Design Studio



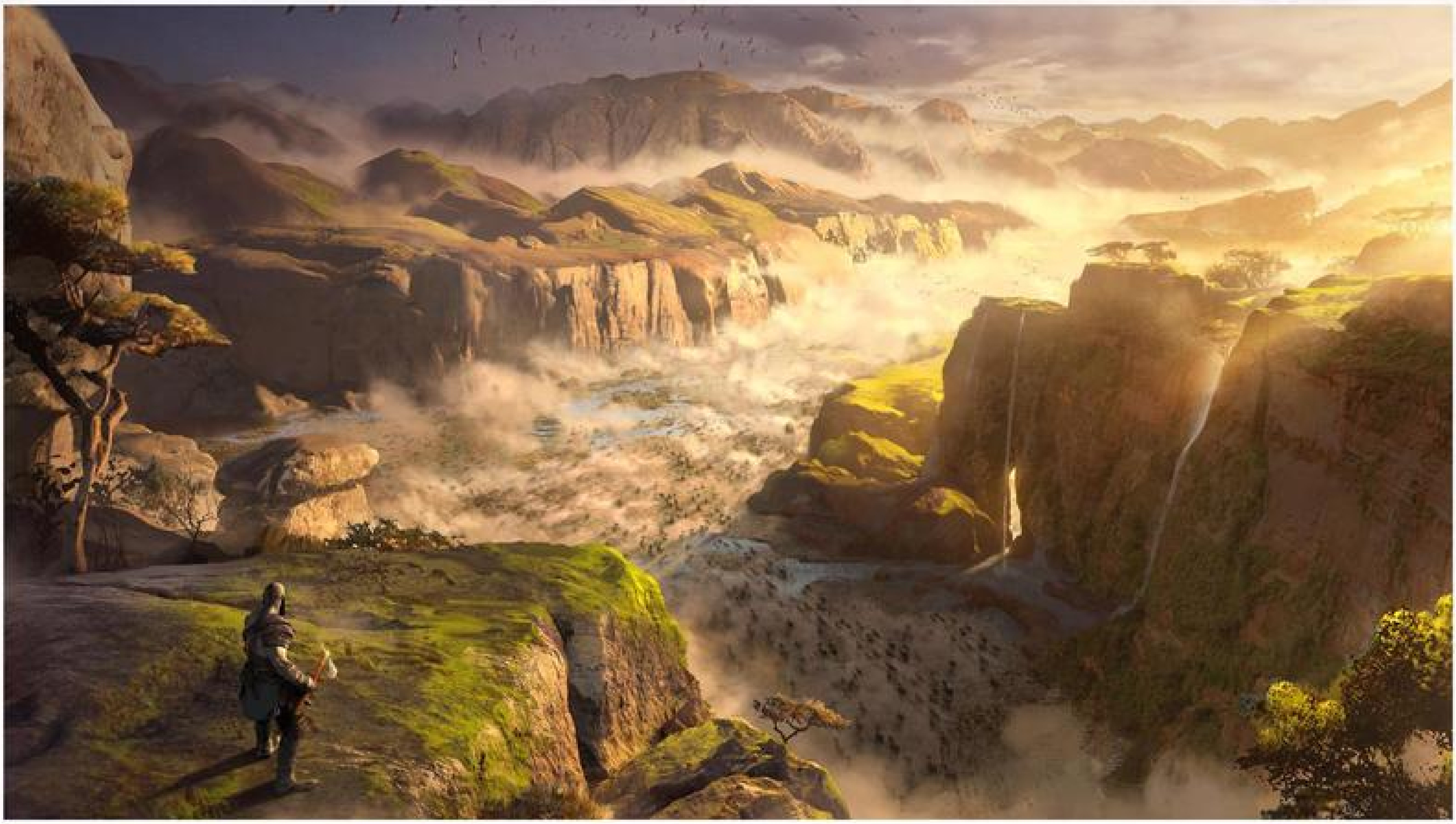
Knitting patterns and weaving techniques from different cultures influenced the exteriors of the Vanir hut designs. This look represents the most common residential structure for the Vanir, but the artists wanted Freya's house to stand apart as a more sacred and unique structure by combining hut and stone elements covered in a bold red hue. They included statues in the space surrounding her house to make it feel more special and meaningful.

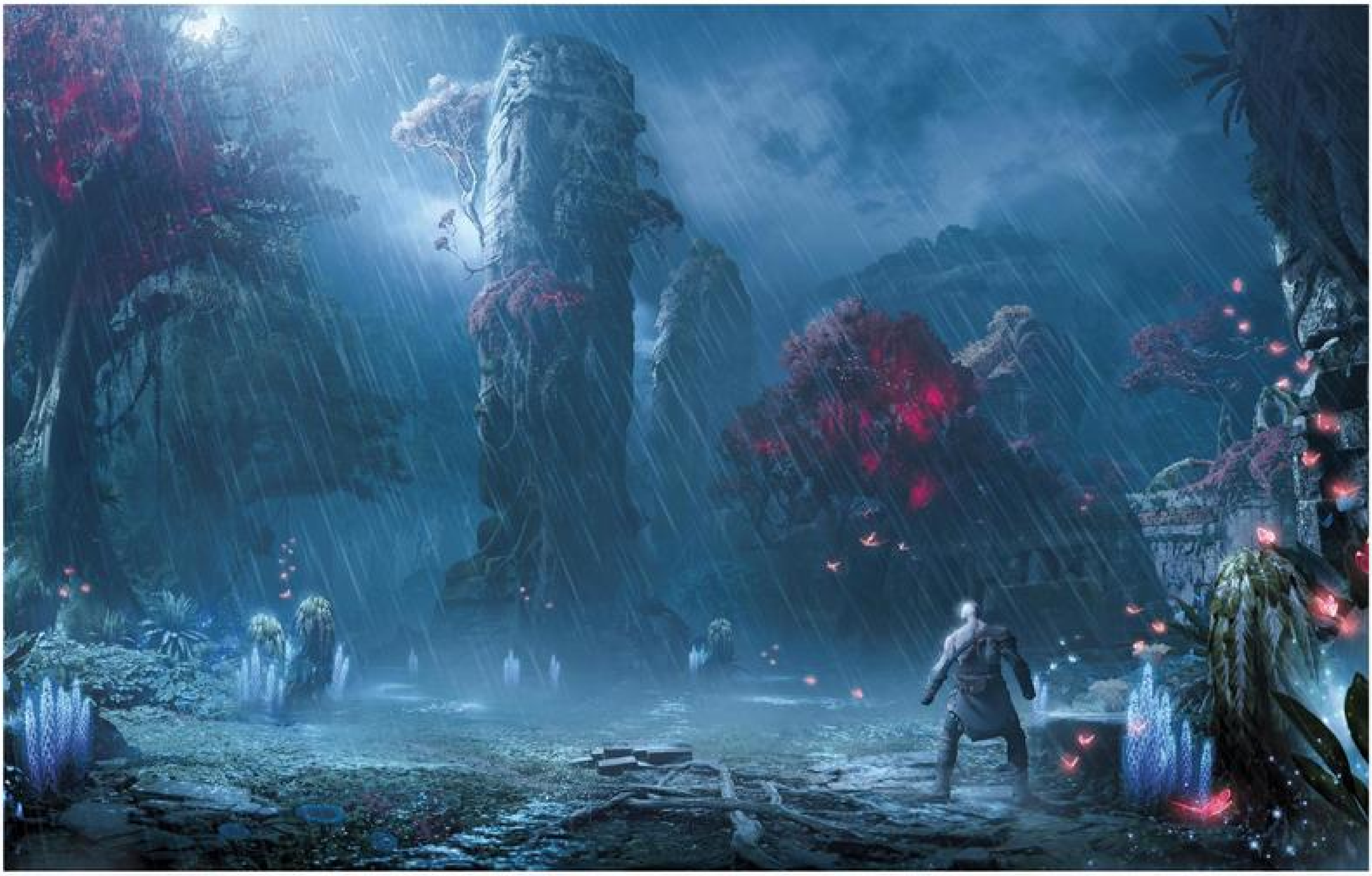




Freya's peaceful garden. Artists: Aaron Contreras, Lina Li, Sup Choi, Justin Hammond (top); Matteo Marjoram (middle); Norris Lin (bottom)

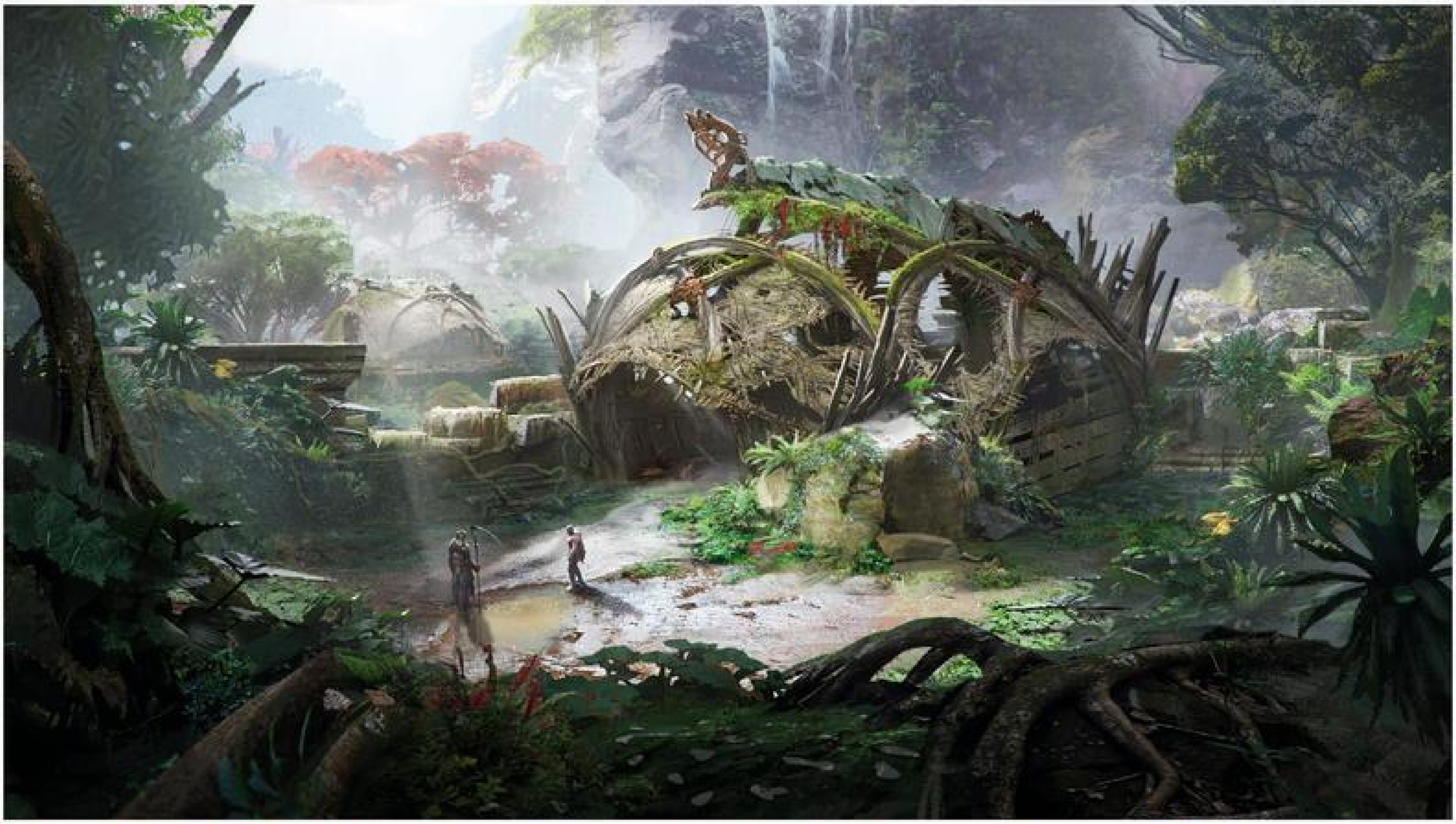
Animal migration in Vanaheim. Artist: Norris Lin

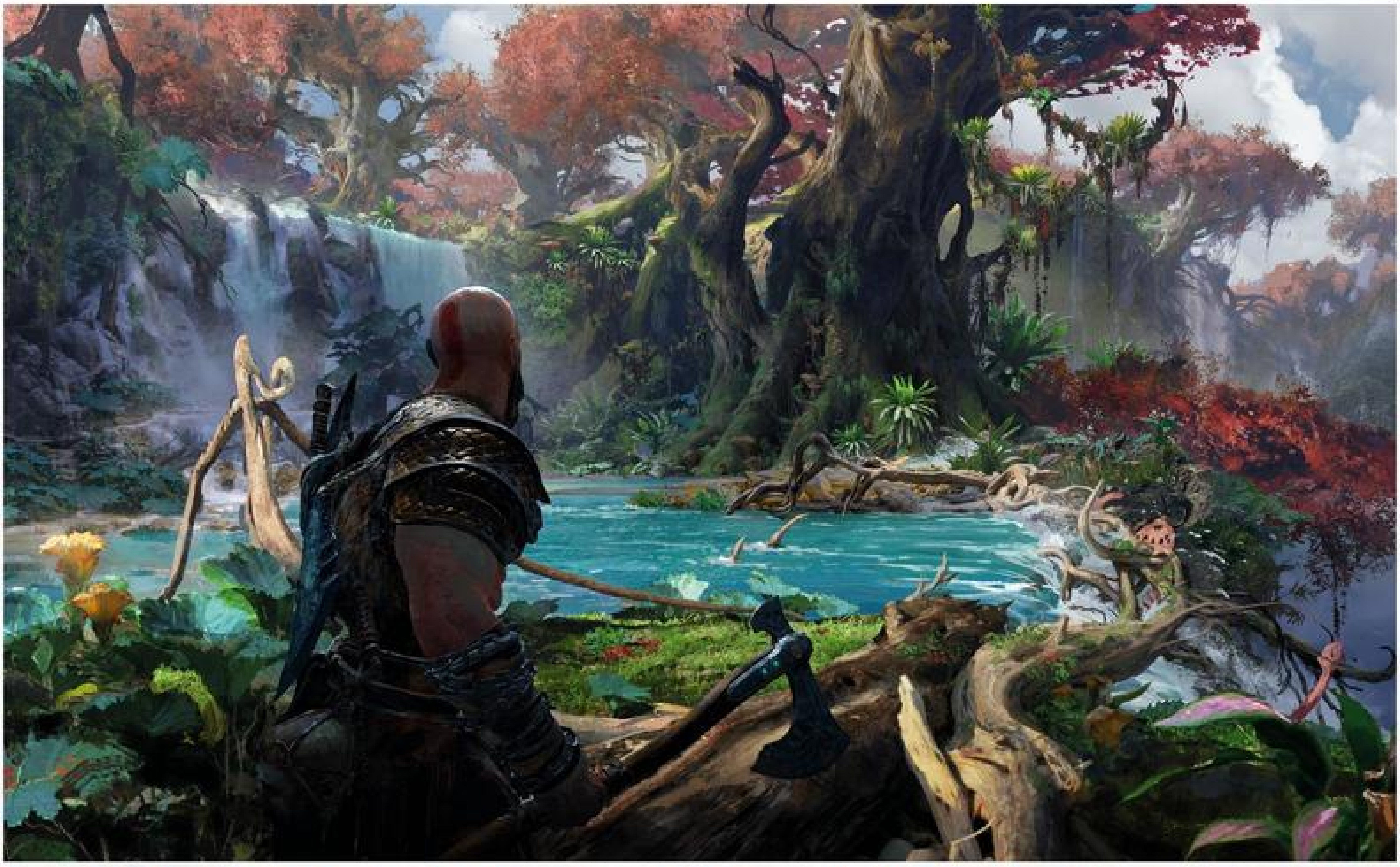




"The migration scene conveys a sense of hope and peace. We wanted to show the transition of the sky from nighttime to daytime when the rain stops and the heavy fog dissipates," Lin said. "It is the daybreak moment where you see the sun just rise up from the horizon and huge herds of animals are migrating toward the horizon. It is heavily inspired by the epic moment of the animal migration in Africa."

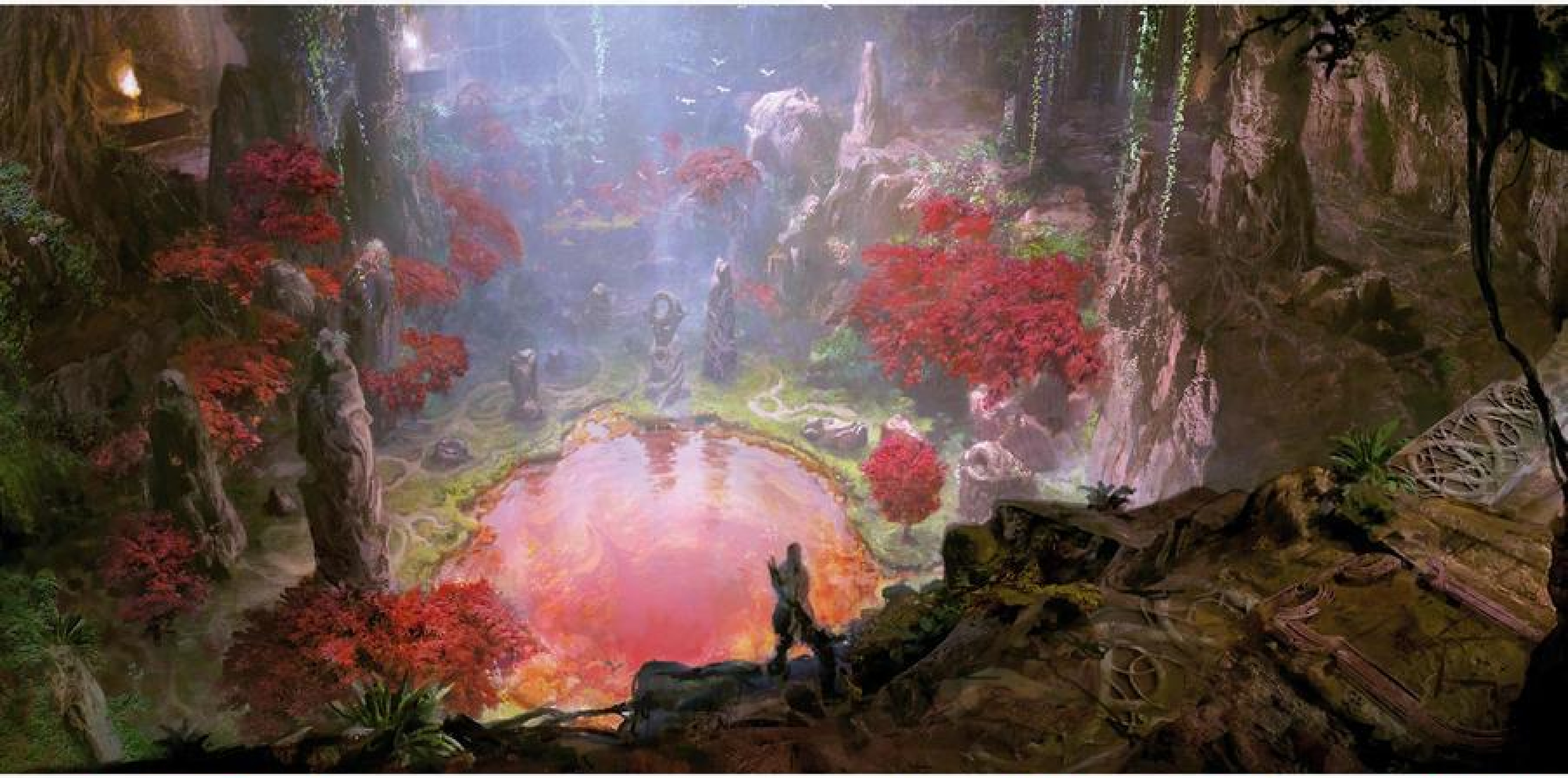
Vanaheim's jungle-like environments. Artists: Ryan Phair (top); KARAKTER Design Studio (bottom)

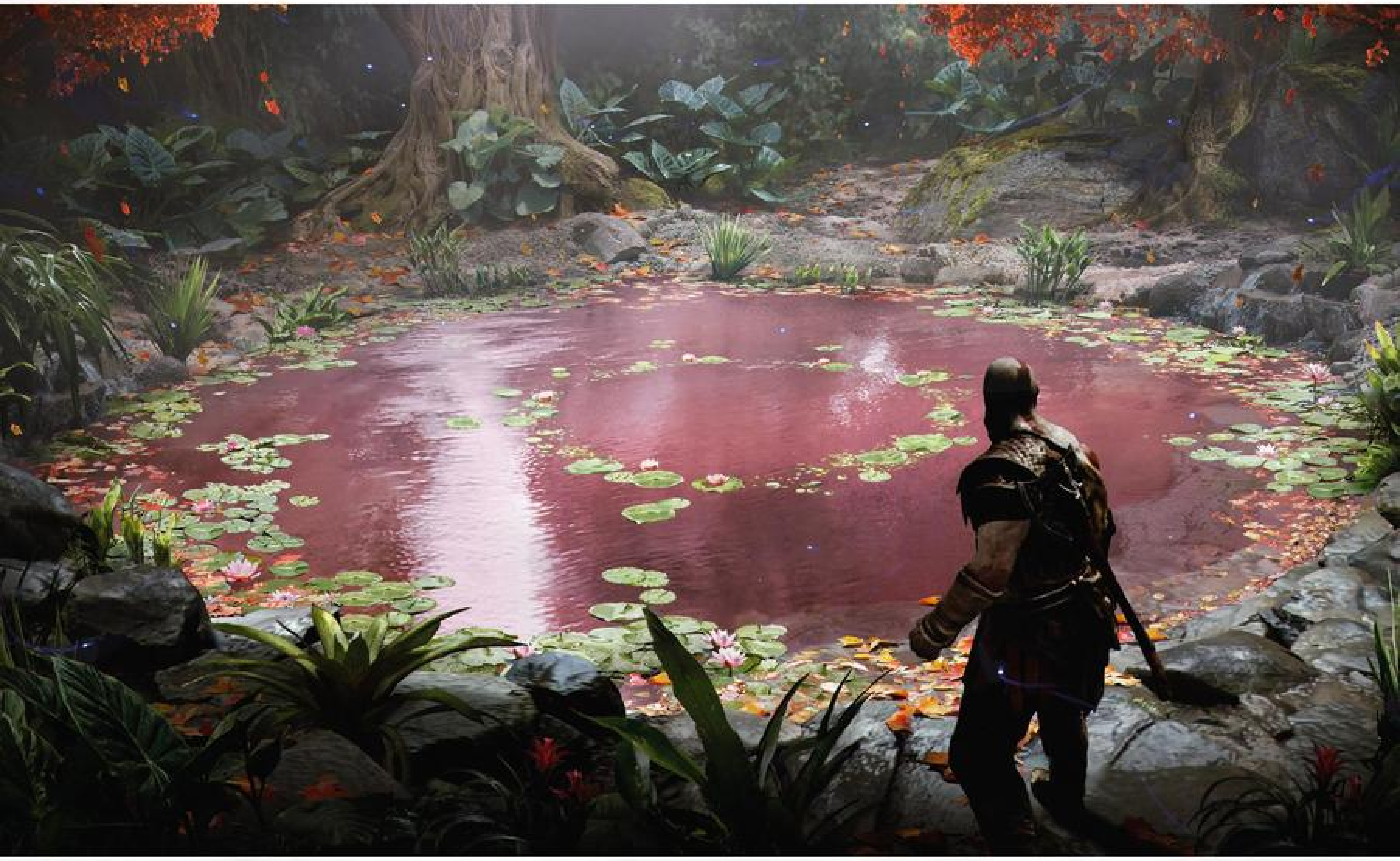




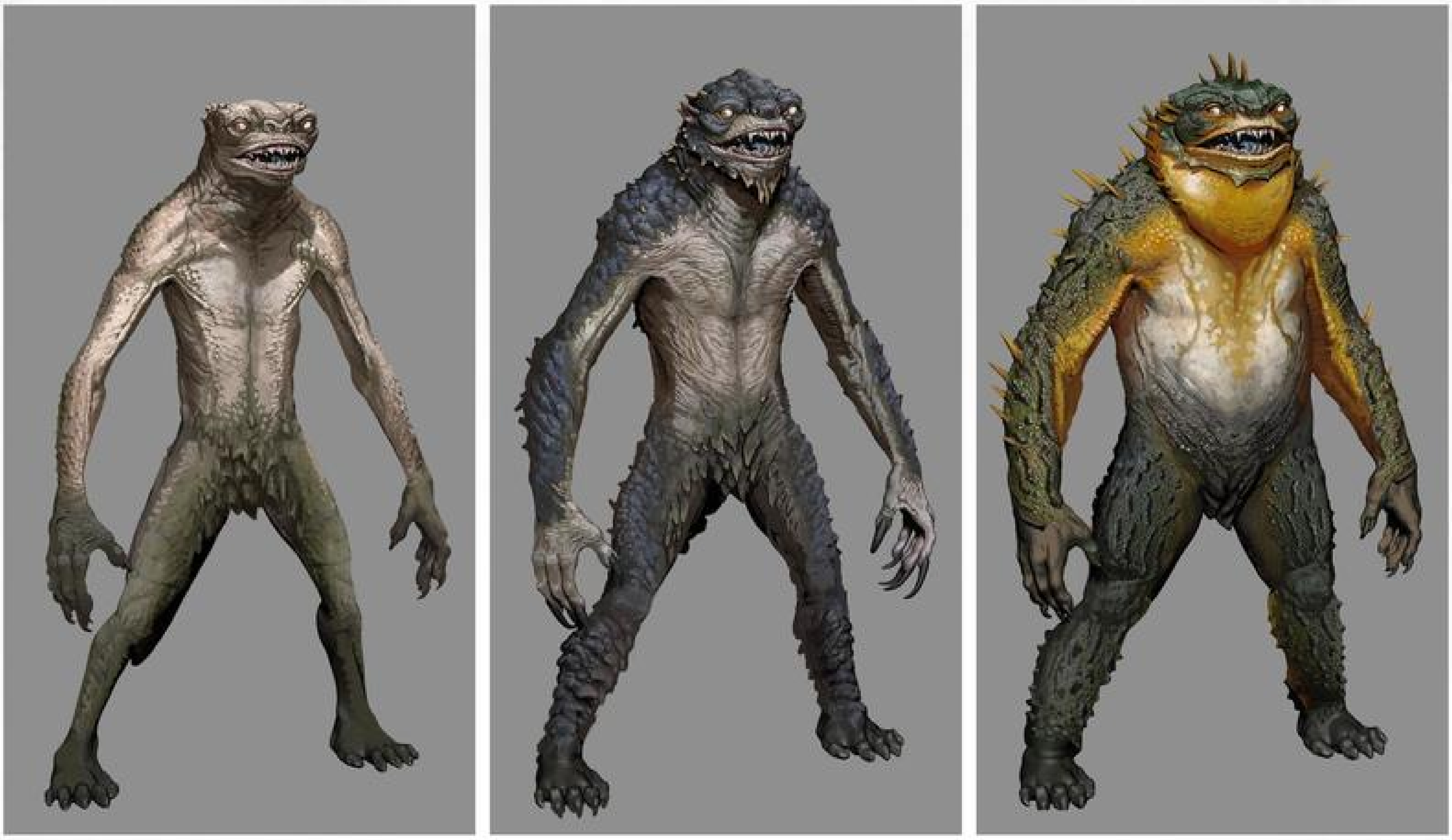
In Norse mythology, the Vanir who call Vanaheim home are the group of gods associated with fertility, among other things. The realm's luscious flora underscores that theme with plant life that thrives throughout the environment. Growth dominates the realm with broad tree canopies and plants winding through and over older structures and artifacts. Oranges and reds infuse Vanaheim's landscapes, bringing in a more whimsical feel to the greens of the jungle foliage. Seen opposite, the brighter hues reflect in a pool that fills a crater.

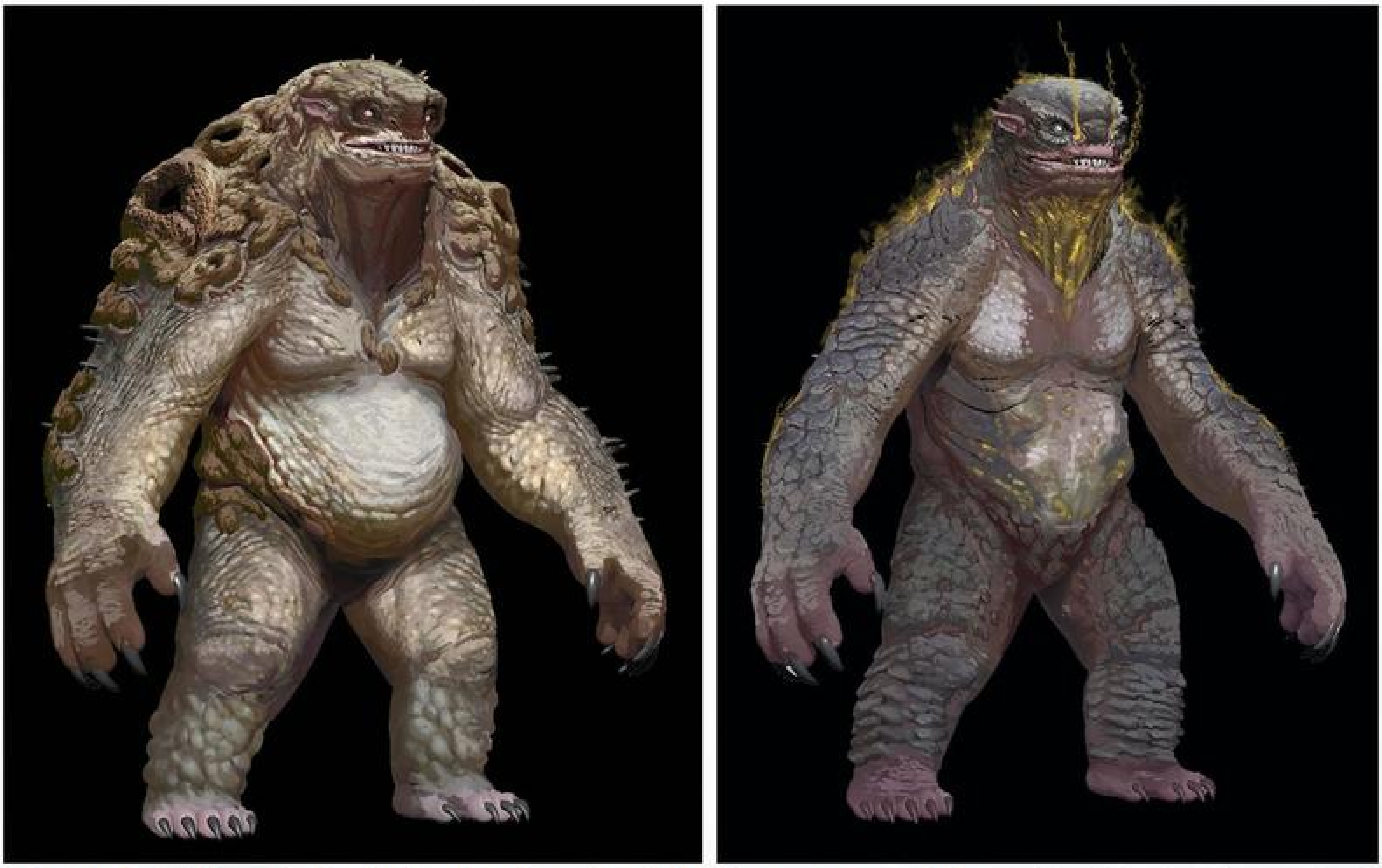
Vanaheim crater concepts. Artists: Ryan Hong (top); Abe Taraky (bottom)





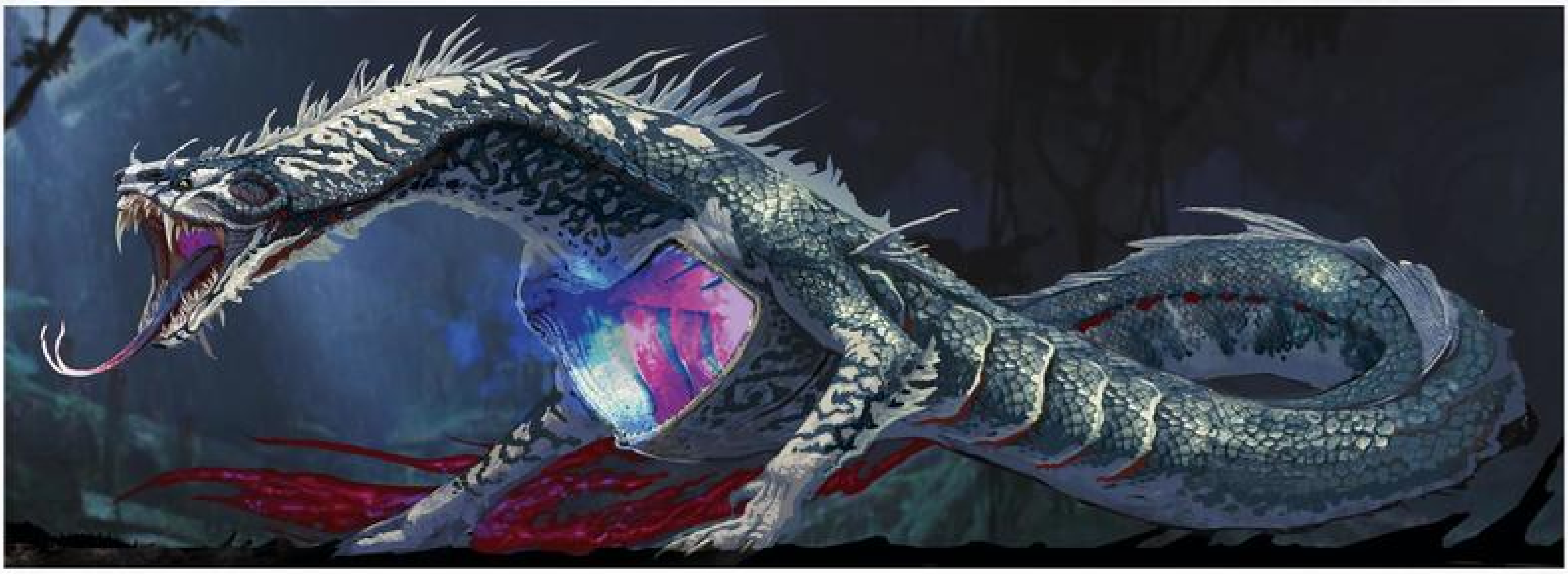
Amphibian cave dweller concepts. Artists: Stephen Oakley, Andrew Ariza (top); Stephen Oakley (bottom)

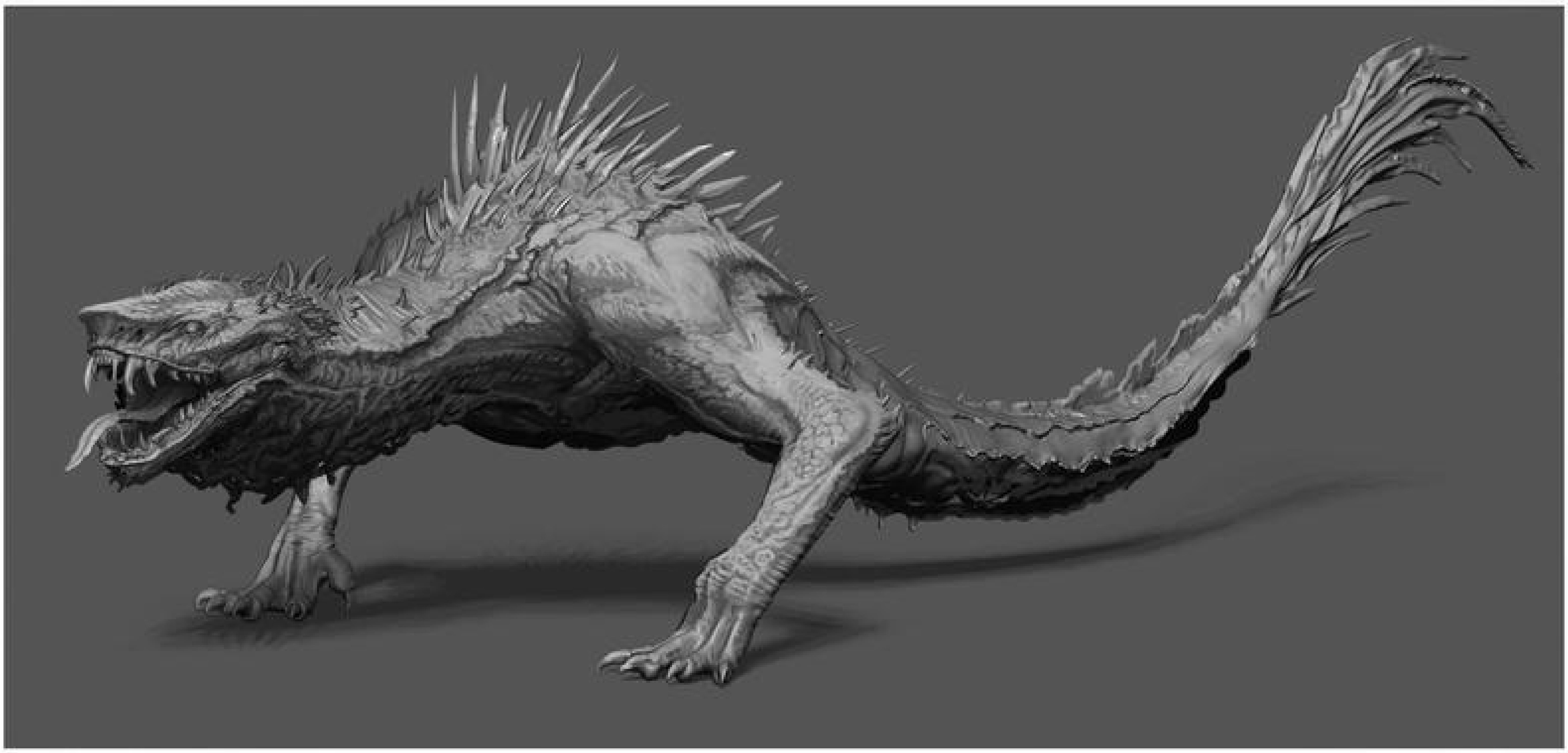


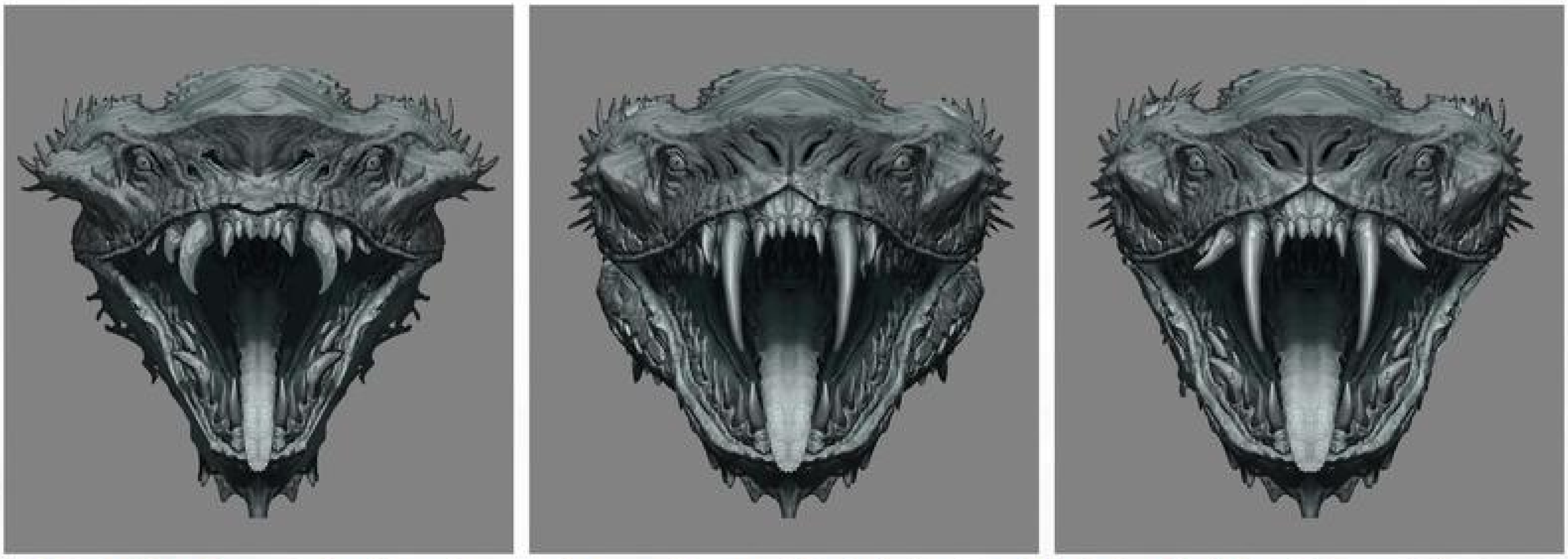


As the artists finalized the cave dwellers, they leaned into the toughness that's evident across various amphibians. Oakley said, "For the lasher, we stuck to the softer salamanders; the grunt, the tough hide of a toad; and the spitter, more poisonous frogs. As for the Cave Mother, some creepy frogs spawn their young from their backs. We took that frog and dirtied up her back like some types of bullfrogs' pools to not completely gross people out!"

Finding the final design for Nidhogg. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); Stephen Oakley, Luke Starkie (middle and bottom)

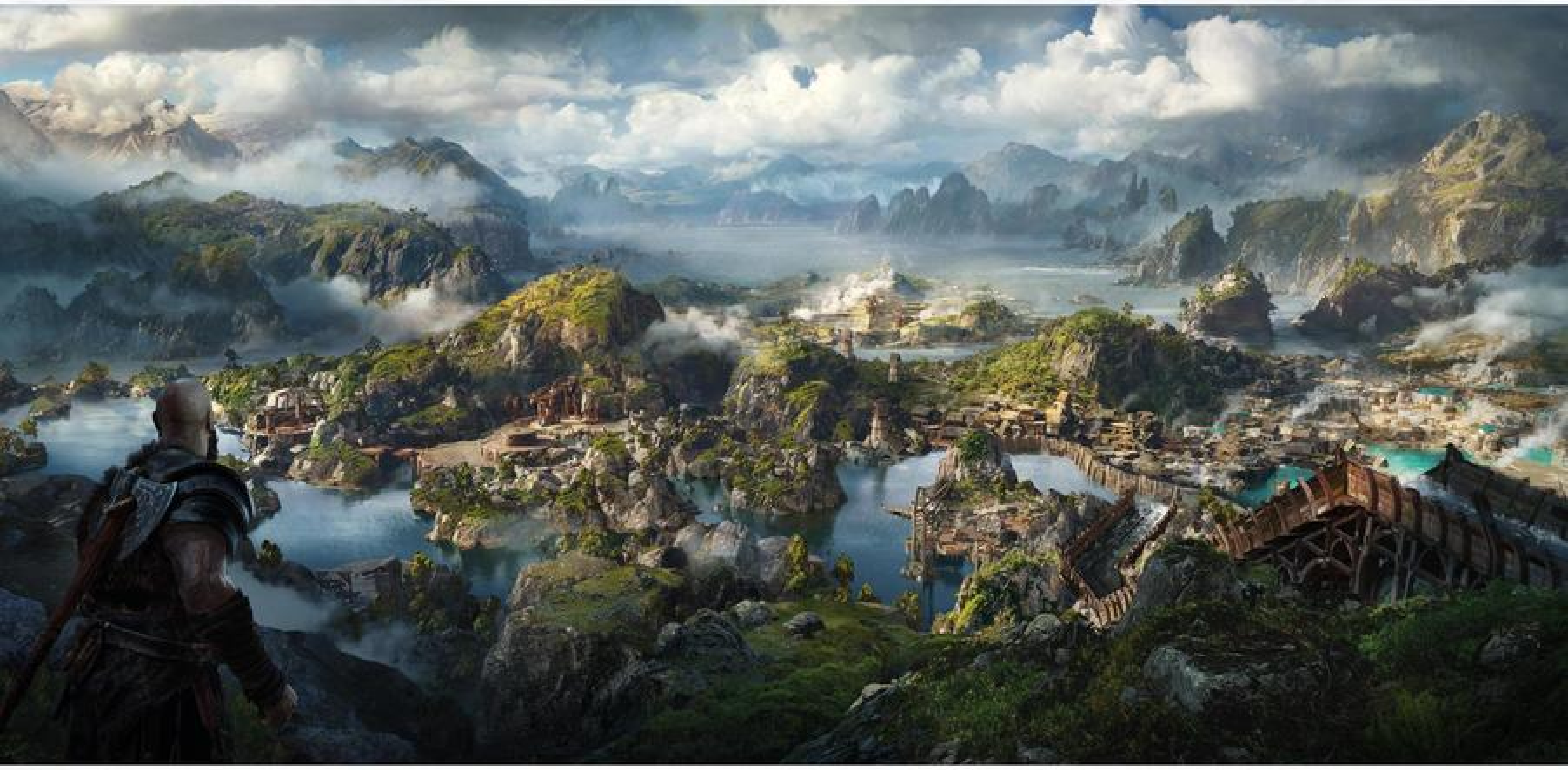


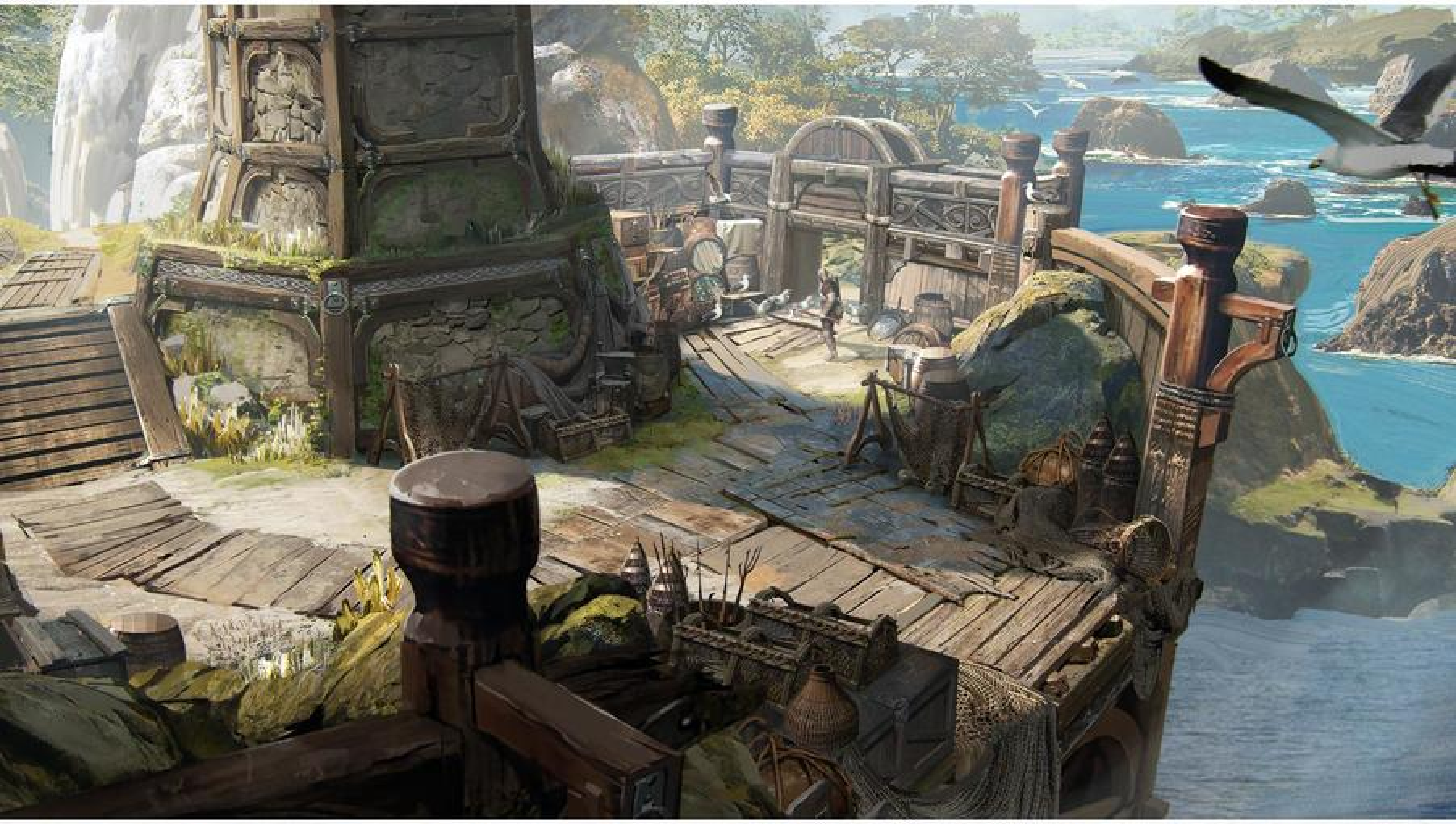




"The final Nidhogg became the horrible combination of a viper with aspects of sharks (both mako and the basking shark) for its belly mouth," Oakley said. "An all-consuming horror, it took efforts from all the team to really bring this monster to life. This part of the process is always the most amazing, as we go back and forth with the sculptors and modelers to find the nuanced details that work best."

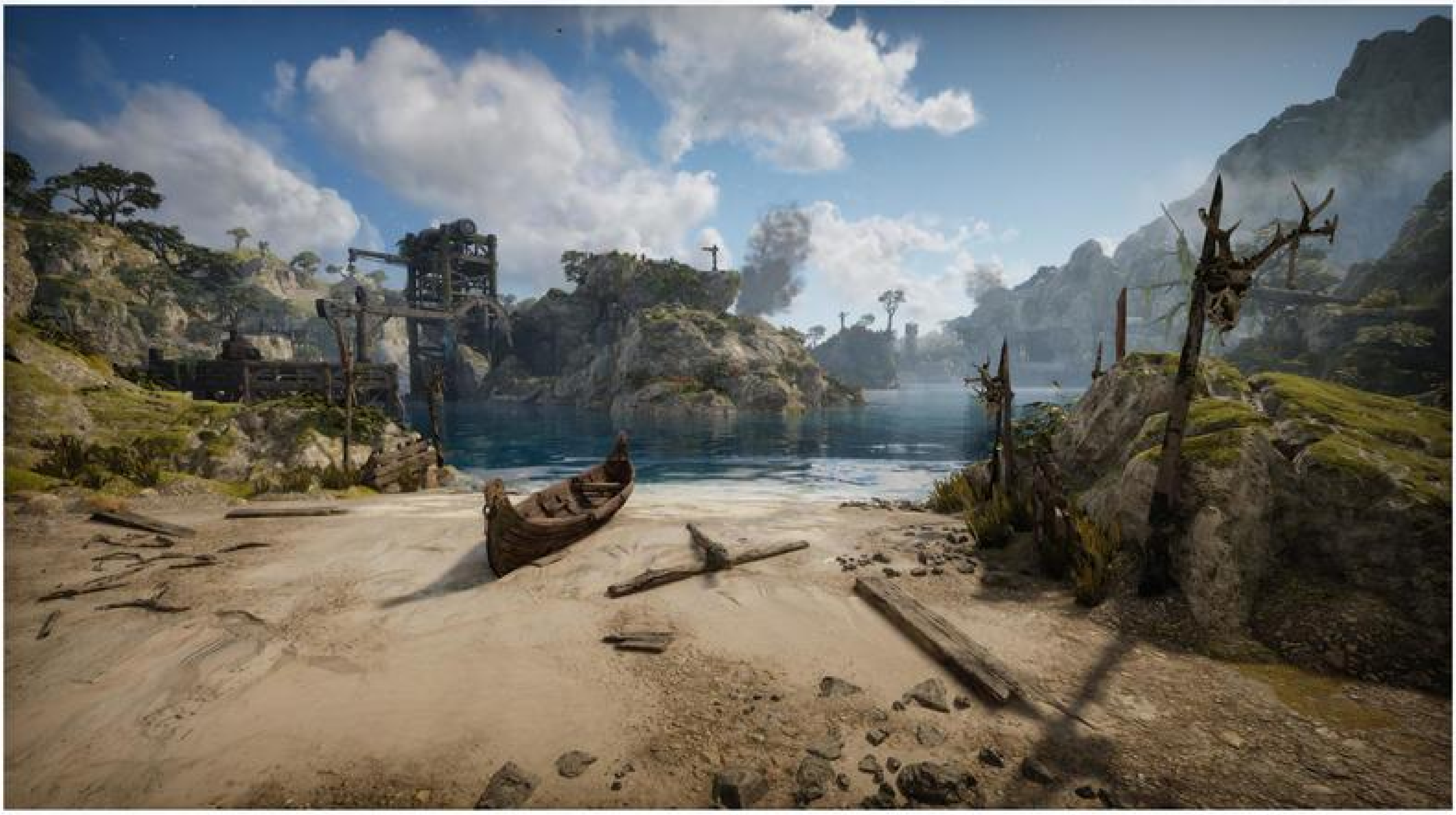
The view from the mountaintop. Artists: KARAKTER Design Studio (top); Ryan Phair (bottom)

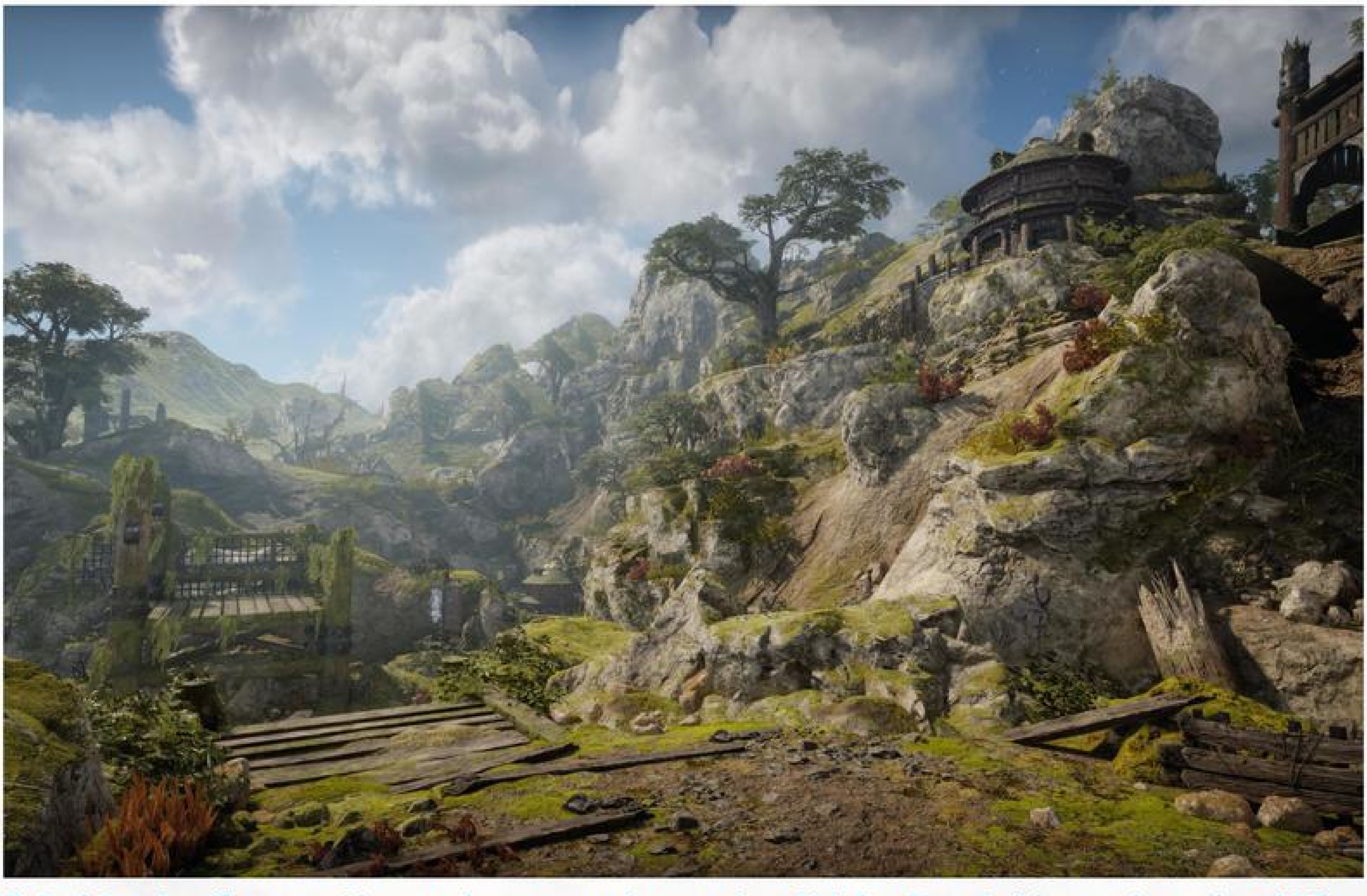




Svartalfheim's train journeys to the top of the mountain, revealing an incredible vista that shows where players came from and where they could go. The North Bay marks one of the game's larger areas, so the artists illustrated all the mining rigs and beaches that are ripe for exploring. But Berliner noted, "The challenge with a vista like this is to show where you can go but also making sure the places you can't visit don't look too appealing."

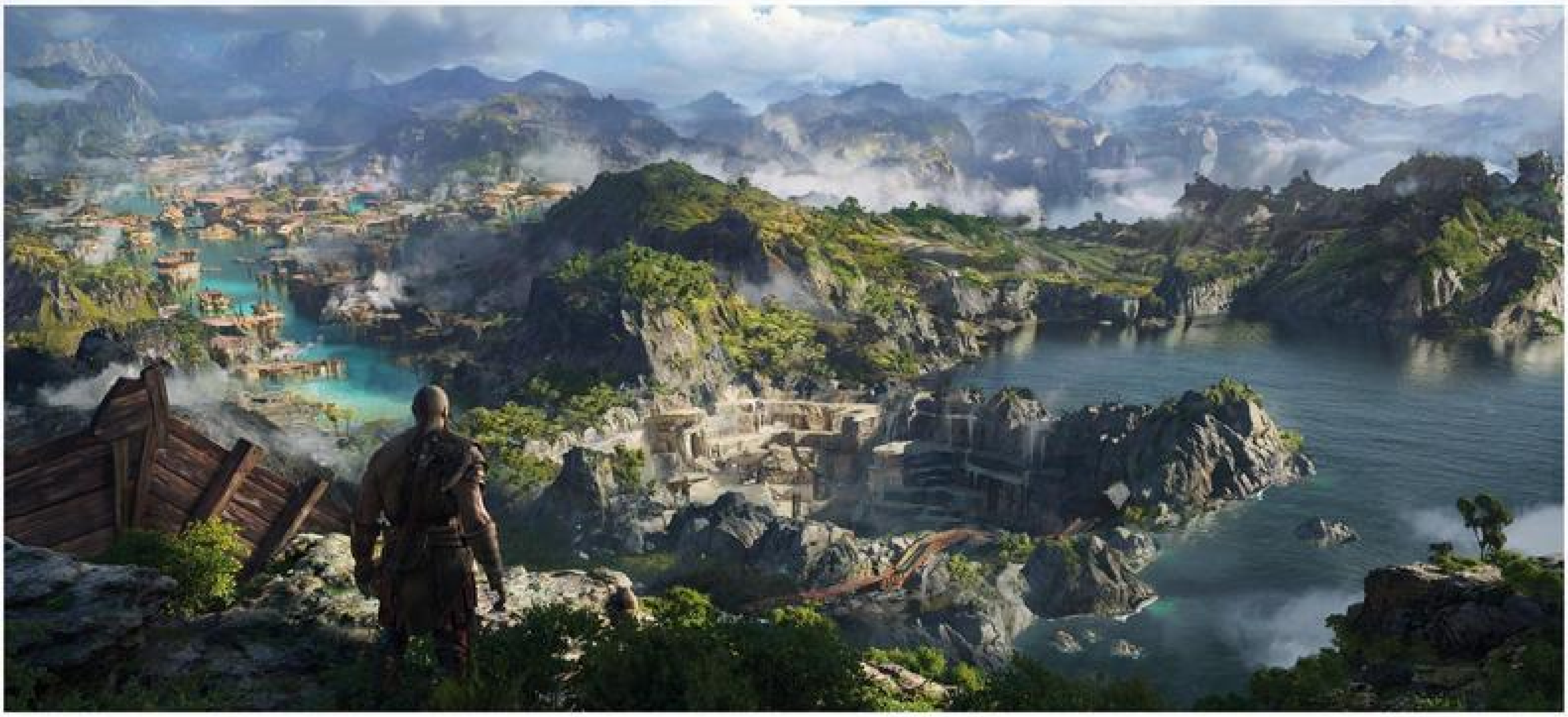
The beautiful corners of Svartalfheim. Artists: Aenok Oh, James Brisnehan, David Nwachukwu, Brandon Cha

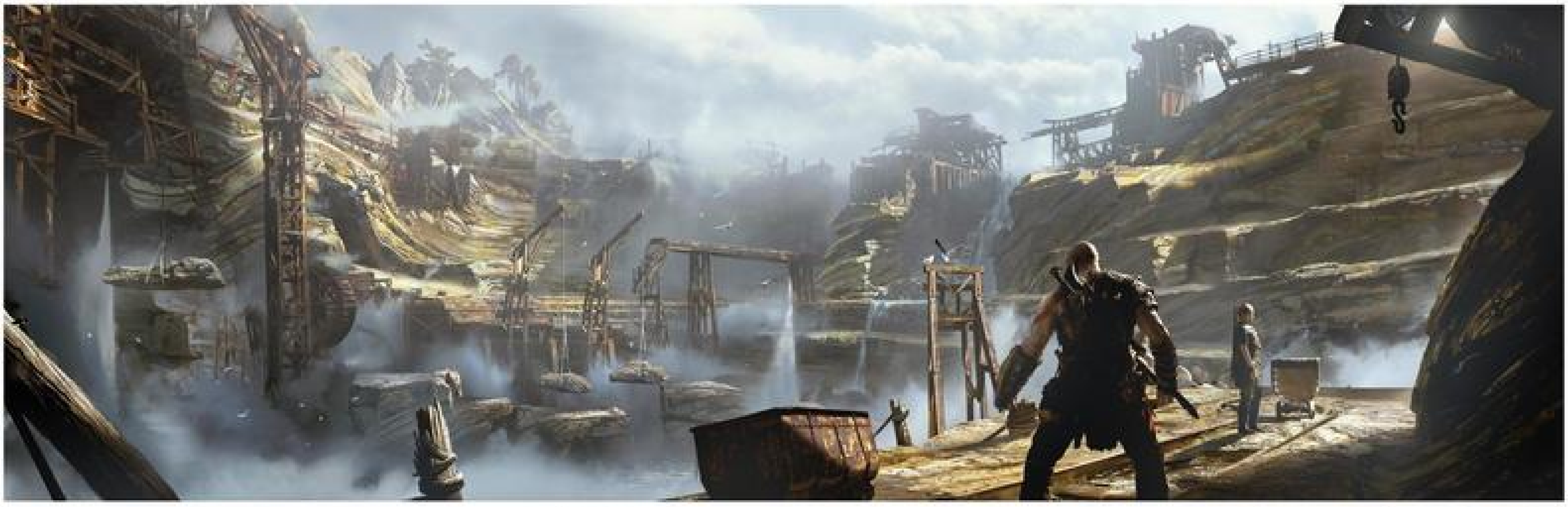


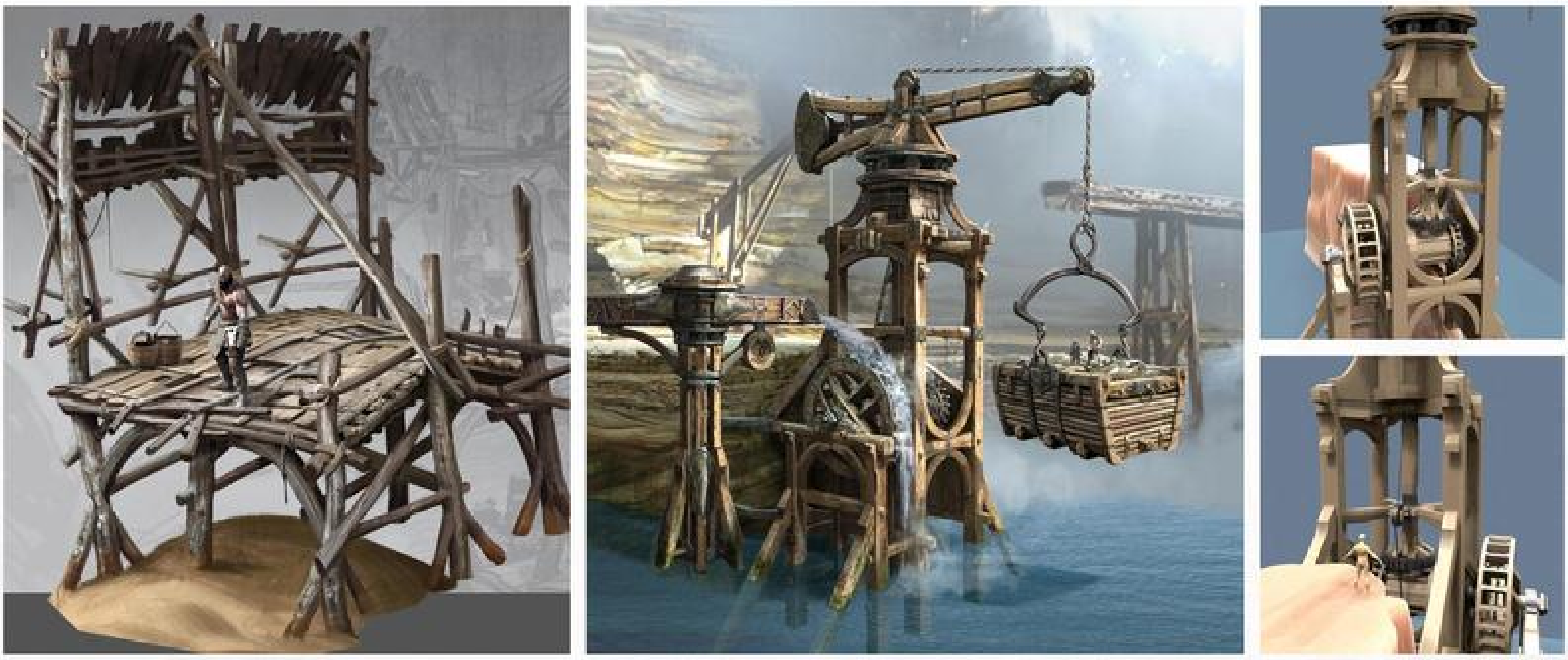


The North Bay in Svartalfheim is one of the many exploration spaces in the game made possible by Santa Monica Studio's continued partnership with Valkyrie Entertainment. Valkyrie helped PlayStation make the previous *God of War* and rejoined the team for *Ragnarök*. In partnership with John Palamarchuk, Aenok Oh, and Brielle Porter, they dedicated themselves to several large exploration spaces, allowing the team to make the largest game Santa Monica has ever produced.

A sweeping view of Svartalfheim. Artists: KARAKTER Design Studio (top); Abe Taraky (middle); Norris Lin (bottom)

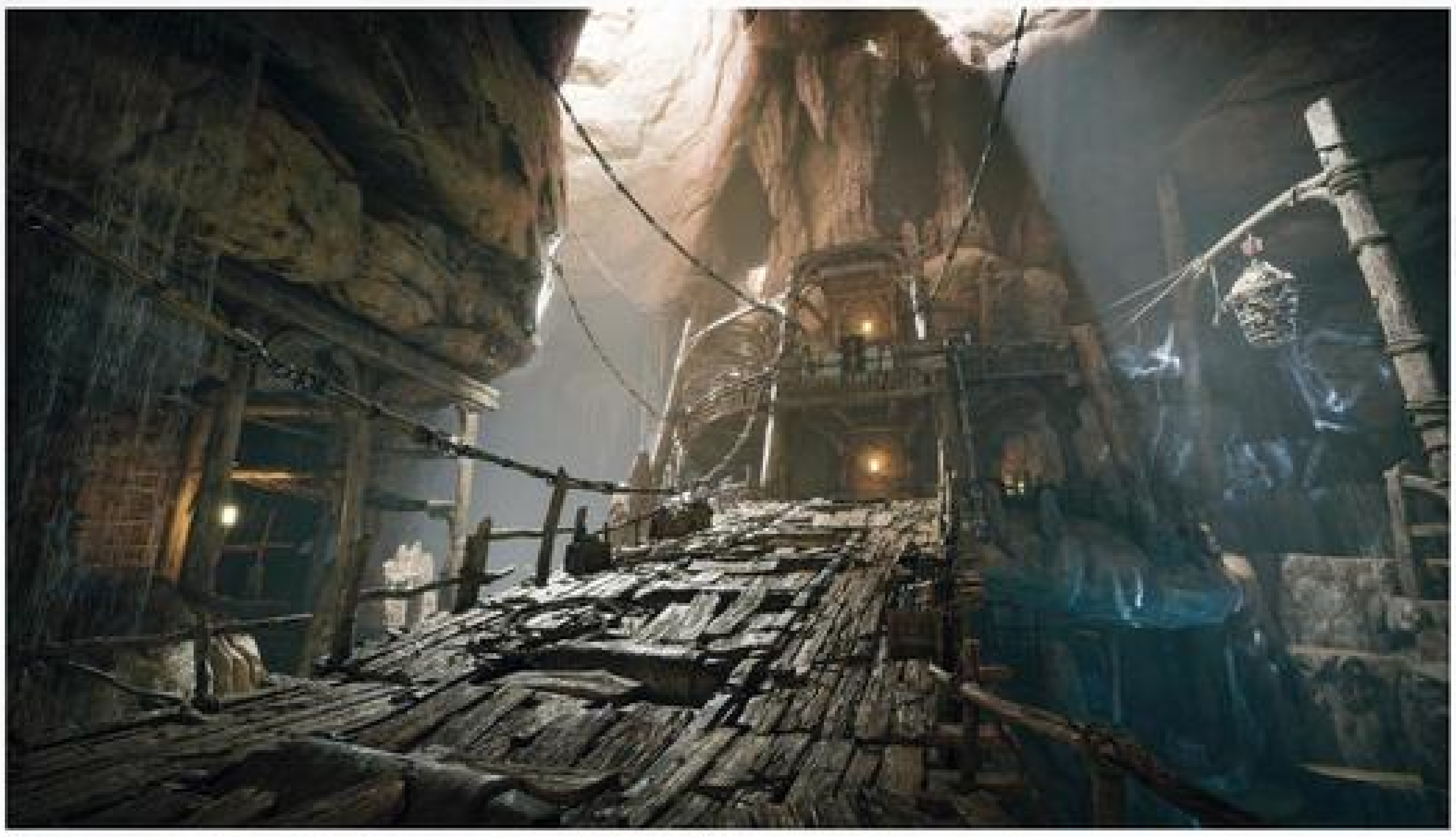




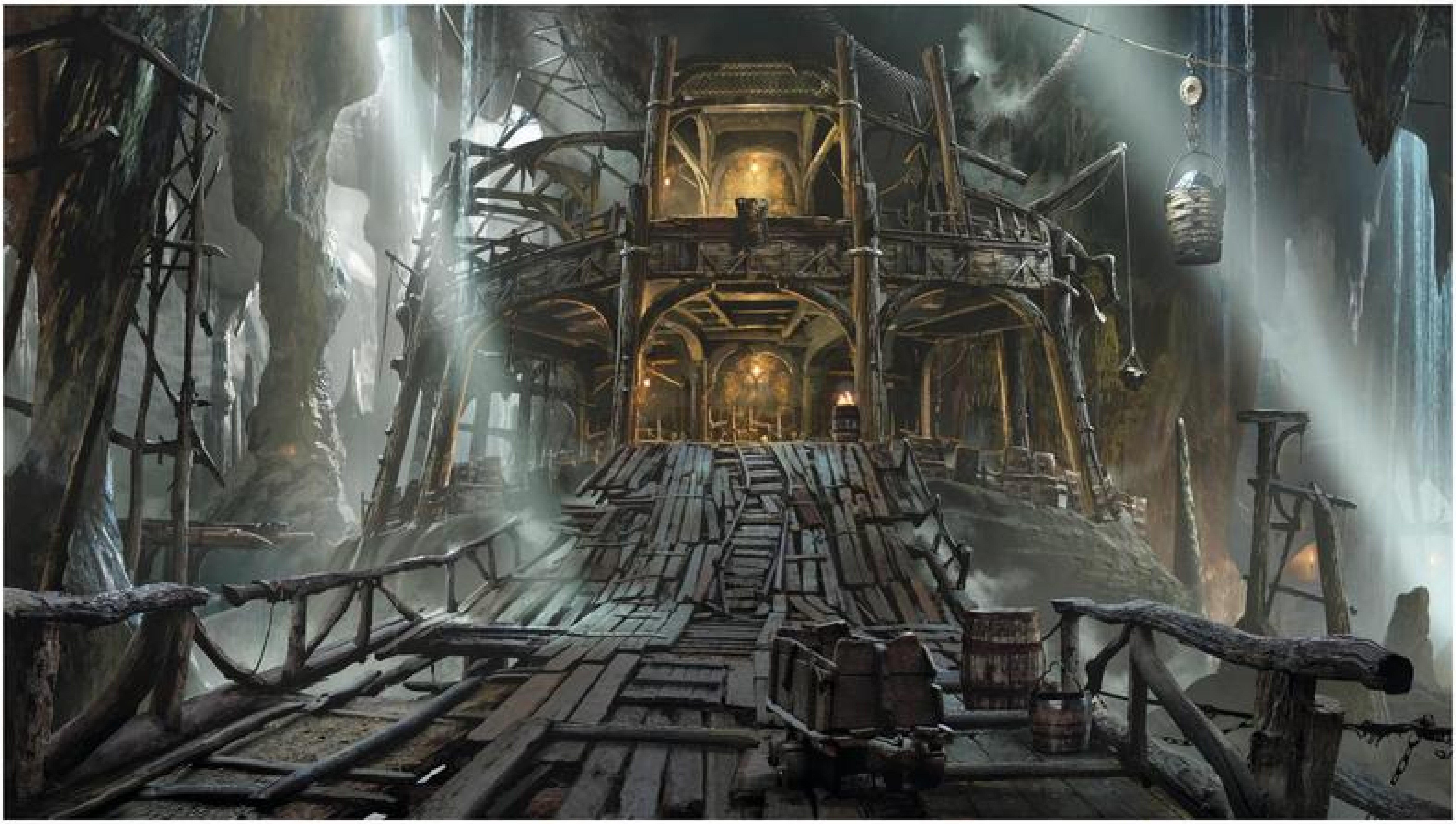


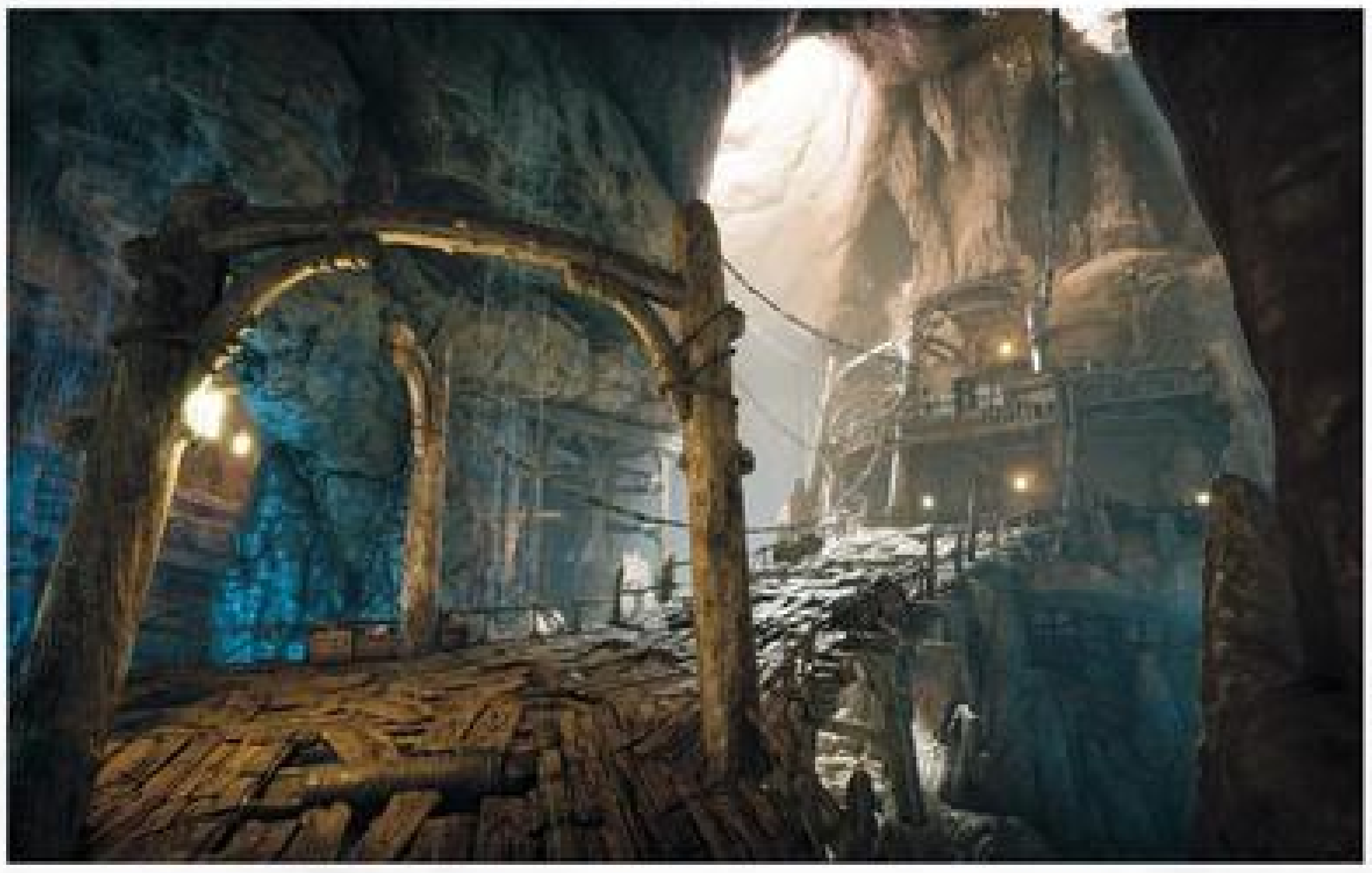
"Pitmine is a Dwarf mining site. The design requires a certain degree of practical and functional believability," Lin explained. "To achieve that, we referenced nineteenth-century mining equipment in order to understand how the mining process worked and decide what specific structures and props were needed in the scene. On the aesthetic side, we really pushed the Dwarf style and craftsmanship, things like curved and bent wooden support and metal brackets."

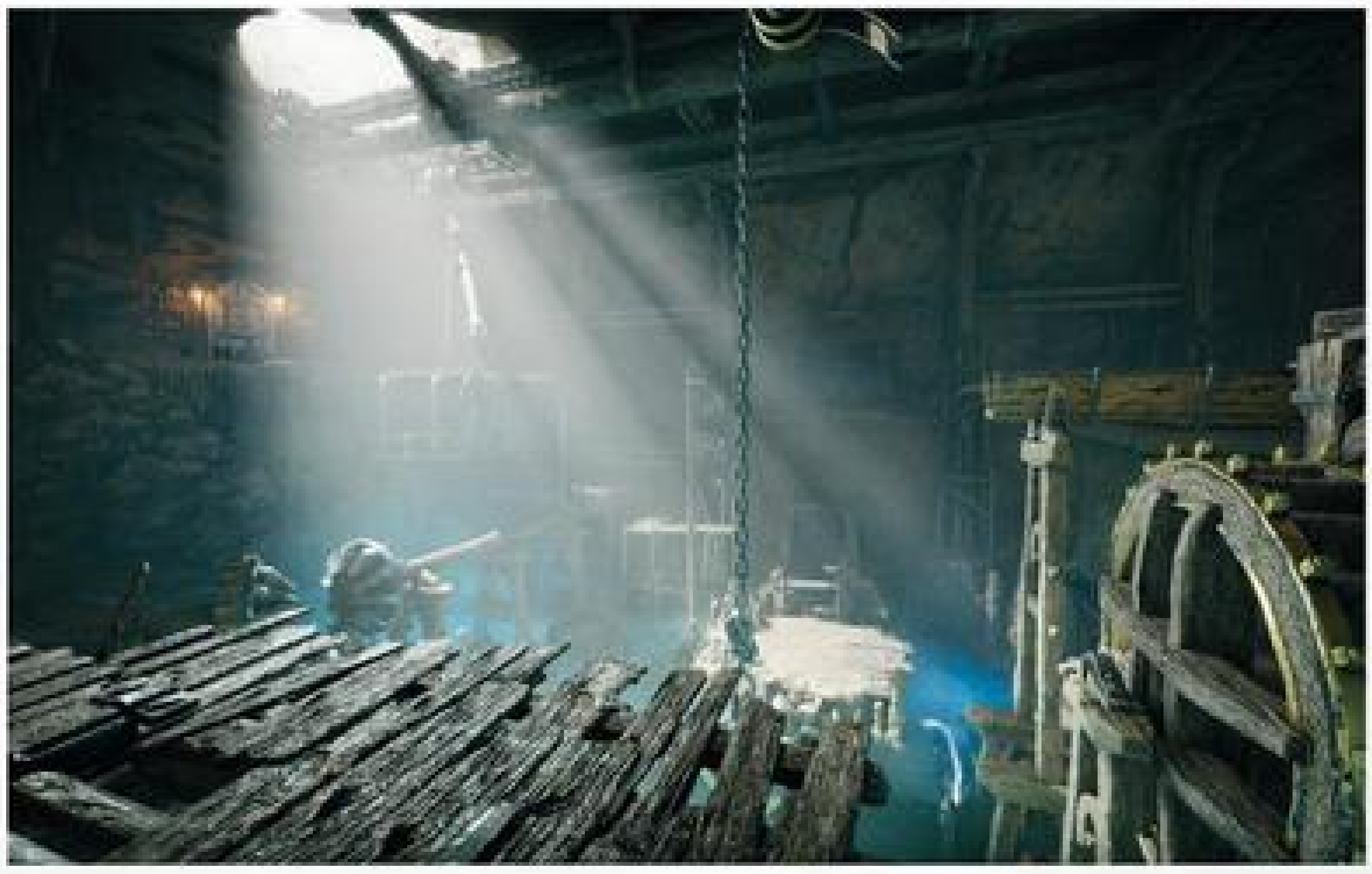
Applecore mine scaffolding. Artists: Raul Aparicio, Steven Mortensen, Brandon Cha (top and bottom); Norris Lin (middle)



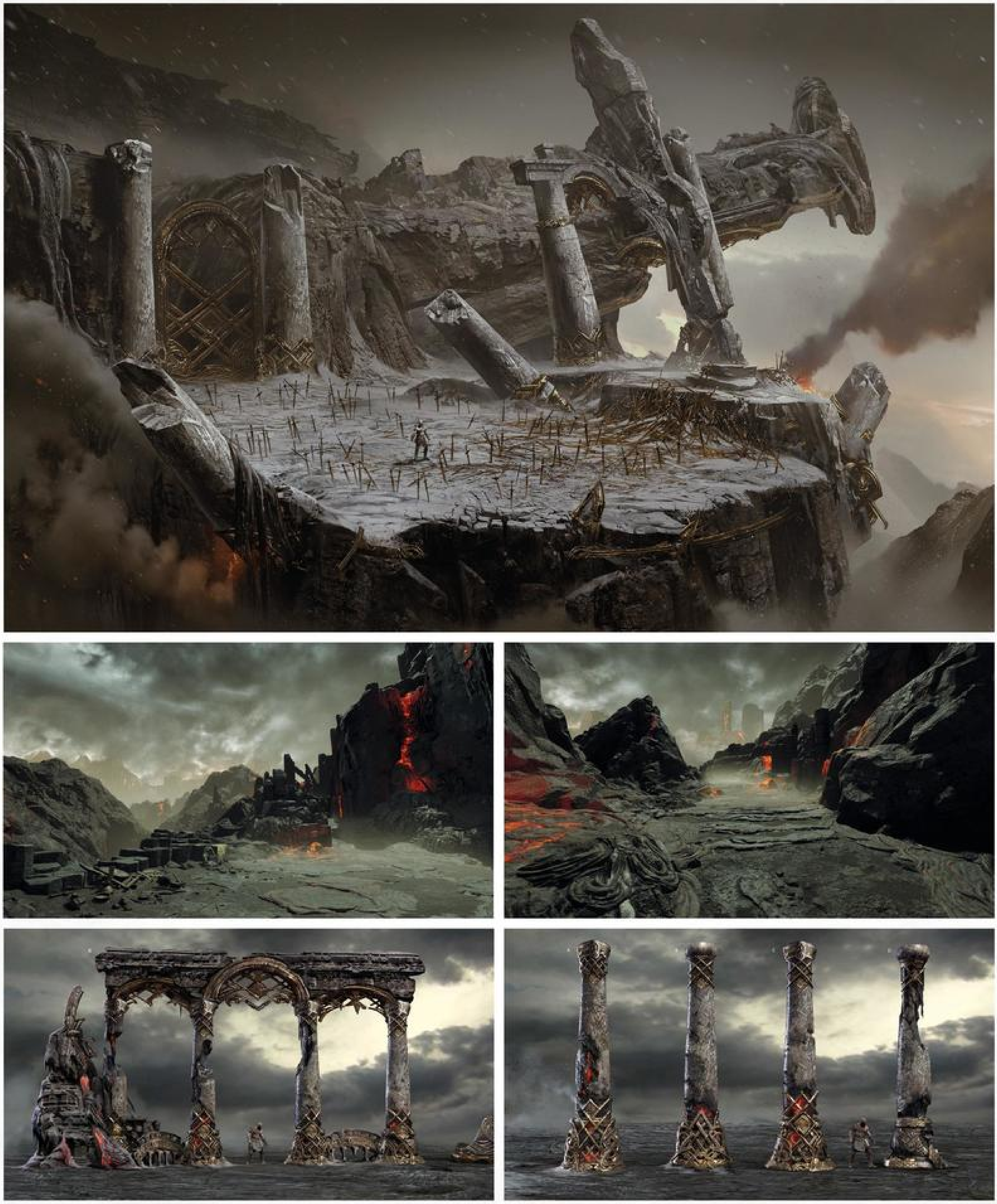
"Svartalfheim's mines consist of both a large pit mine and a meandering cave system," artist Steven Mortensen said. "Making this area feel alive with Dwarven machinery was a big goal and challenge. The embodiment of this goal can be experienced in a log-ride sequence that took inspiration from amusement park rides, letting Kratos and Atreus take in the Dwarven mining operation and life within the caves. This environment was a major team effort to bring to life."





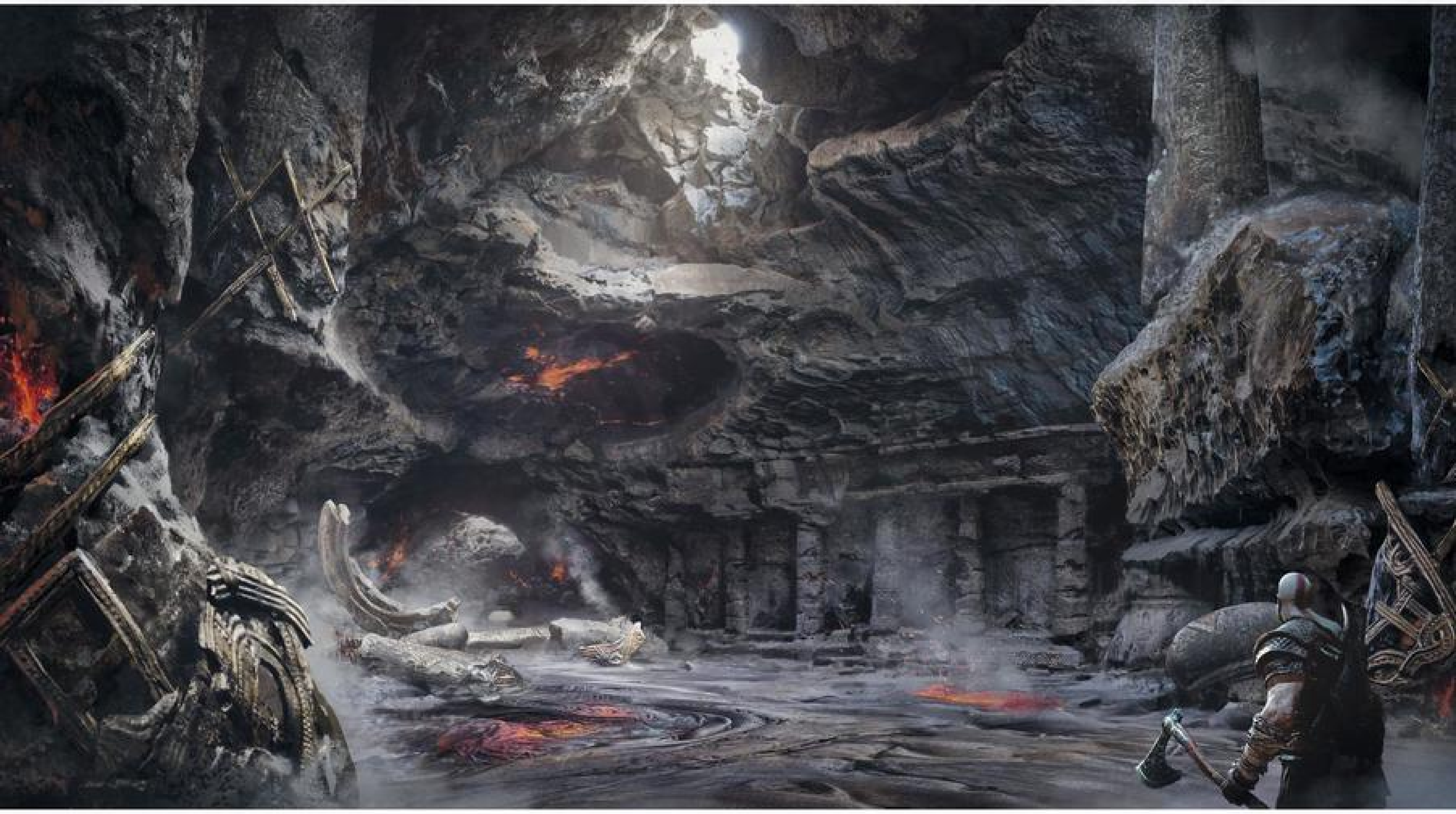


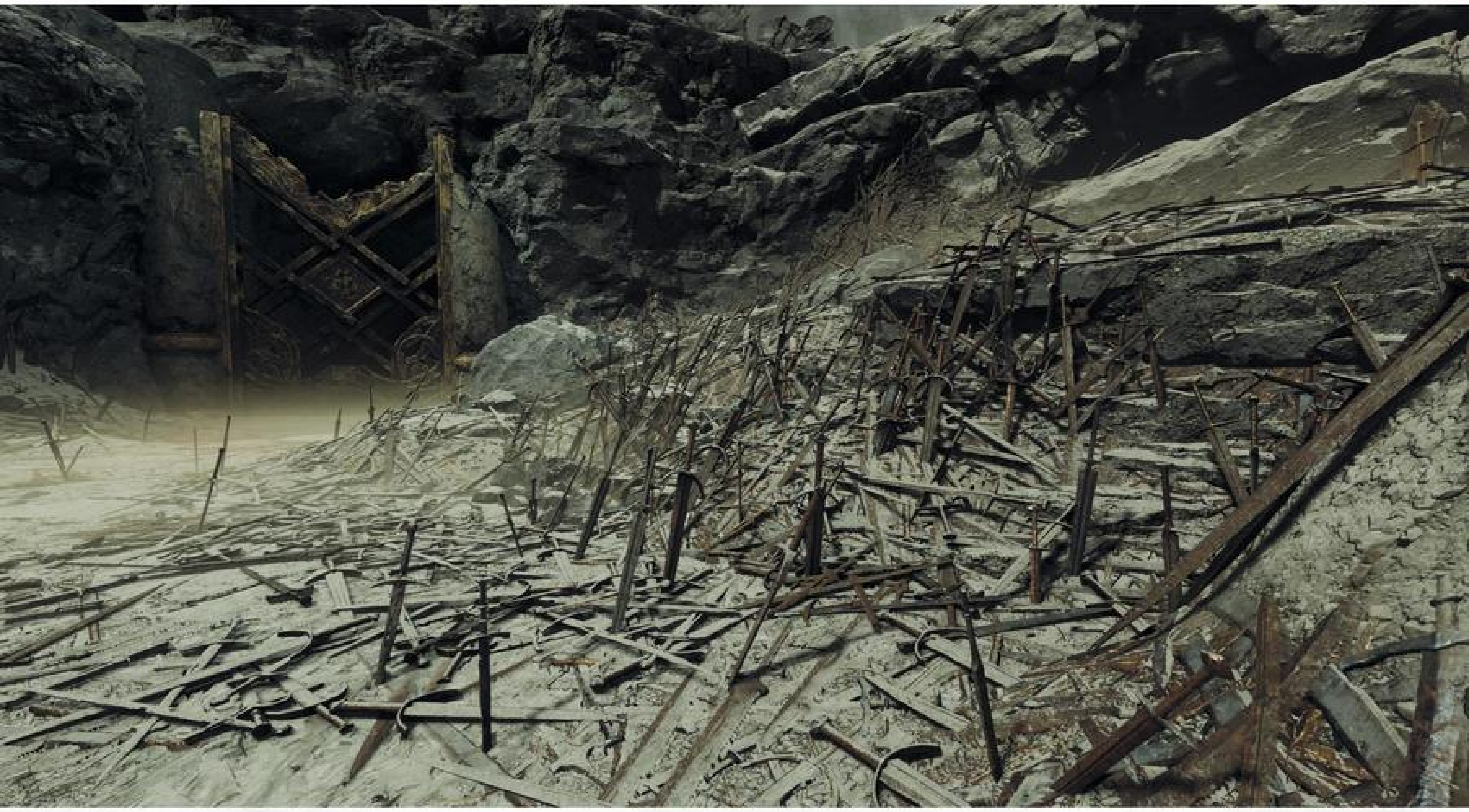
Battlefield remnants on Muspelheim. Artists: Abe Taraky (top); Allen Kung (middle); Norris Lin (bottom)



"Muspelheim is the realm that has intensive volcanic activity," Lin said. "Most of the ground is covered with lava and ash, with different scales of eruption in certain areas to create pockets of visual interest. The architecture elements in the area are mostly large columns, gateways, and sometimes a unique point of interest. We wanted to make them look partially melted from the high temperature, and sometimes you can still see active lava is glowing inside."

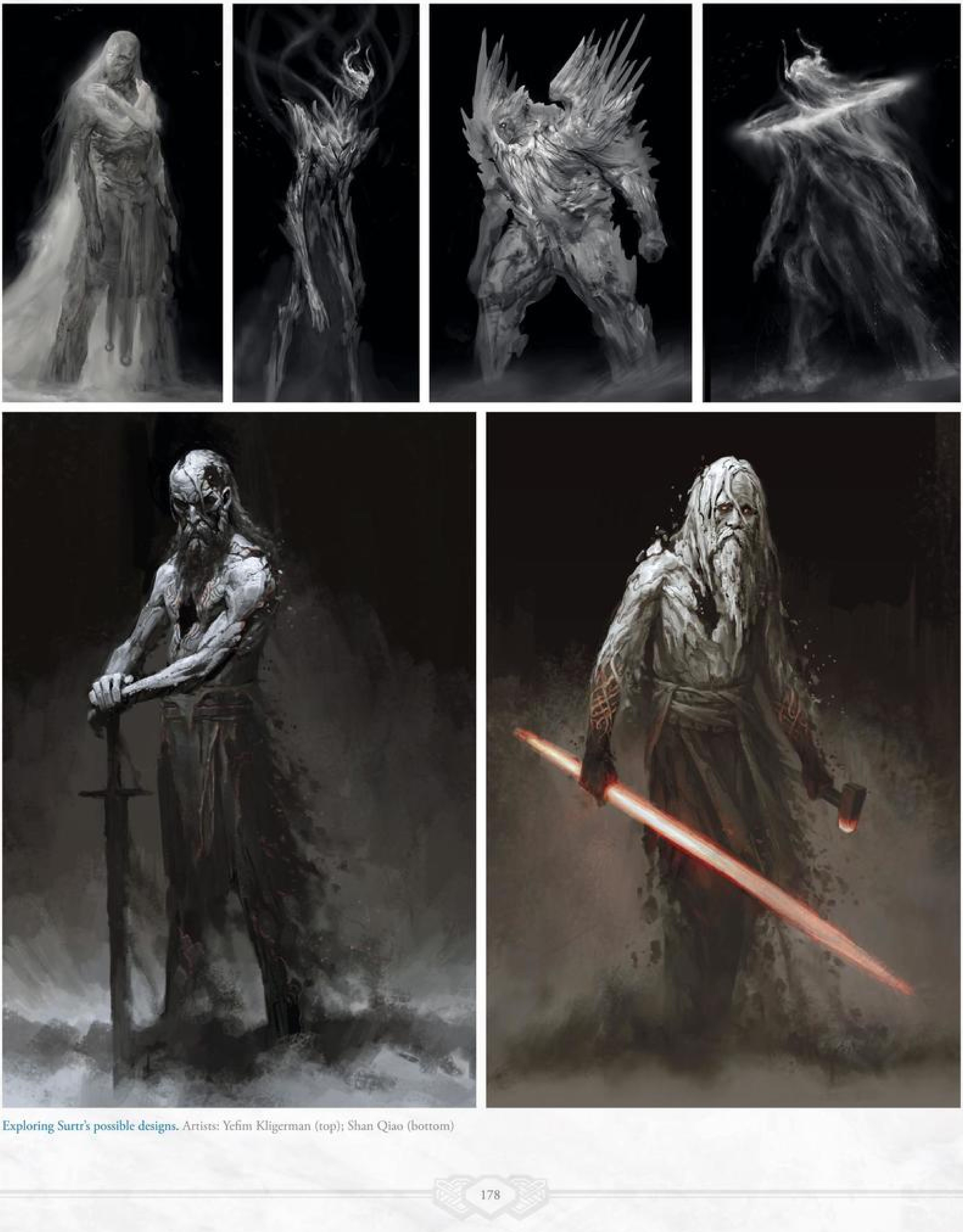
Exploring Muspelheim's architecture. Artists: Norris Lin (top); Nick Vigna (bottom)





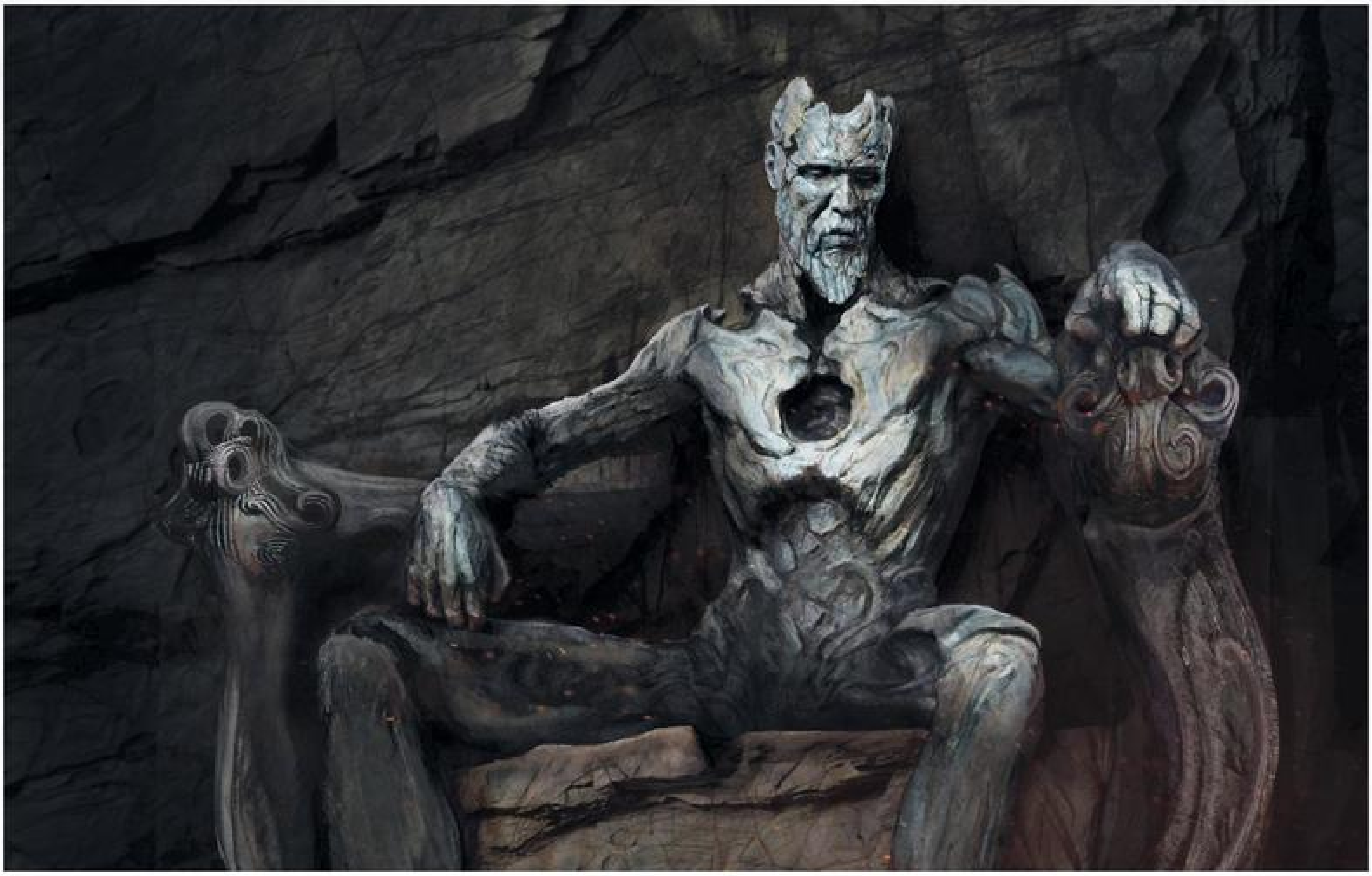
SURTR

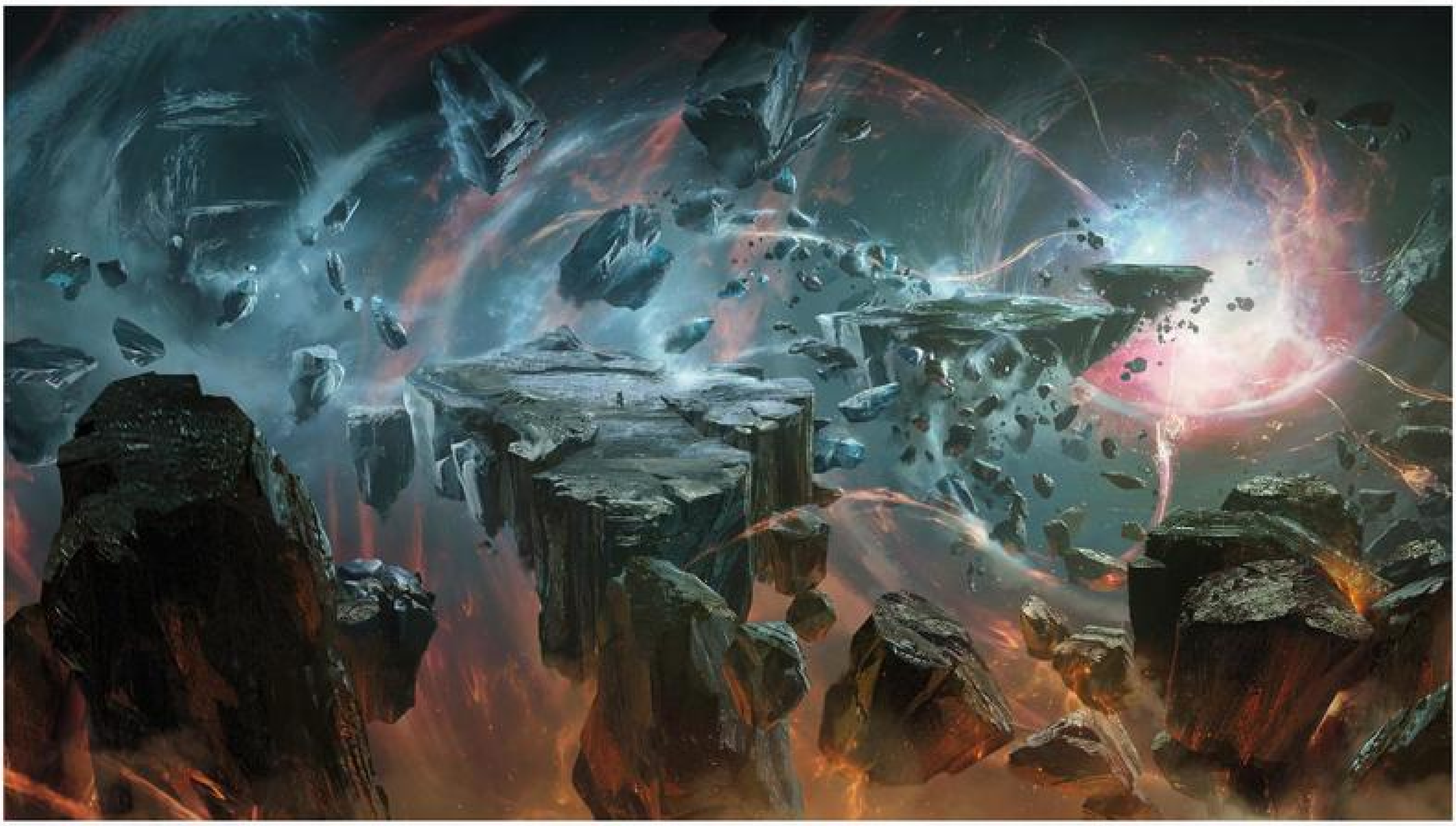
"These early Surtr designs focused on his relationship and bond with Sinmara and how they were two halves of a whole," Kligerman said. "Since her design was more ethereal and sensitive, it was a fun task combining that with Surtr's rockiness and harshness. A few of these illustrations focused on how they could be integrated with each other while showing their love for each other through their embrace and shared form."



Exploring Surtr's possible designs. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Shan Qiao (bottom)

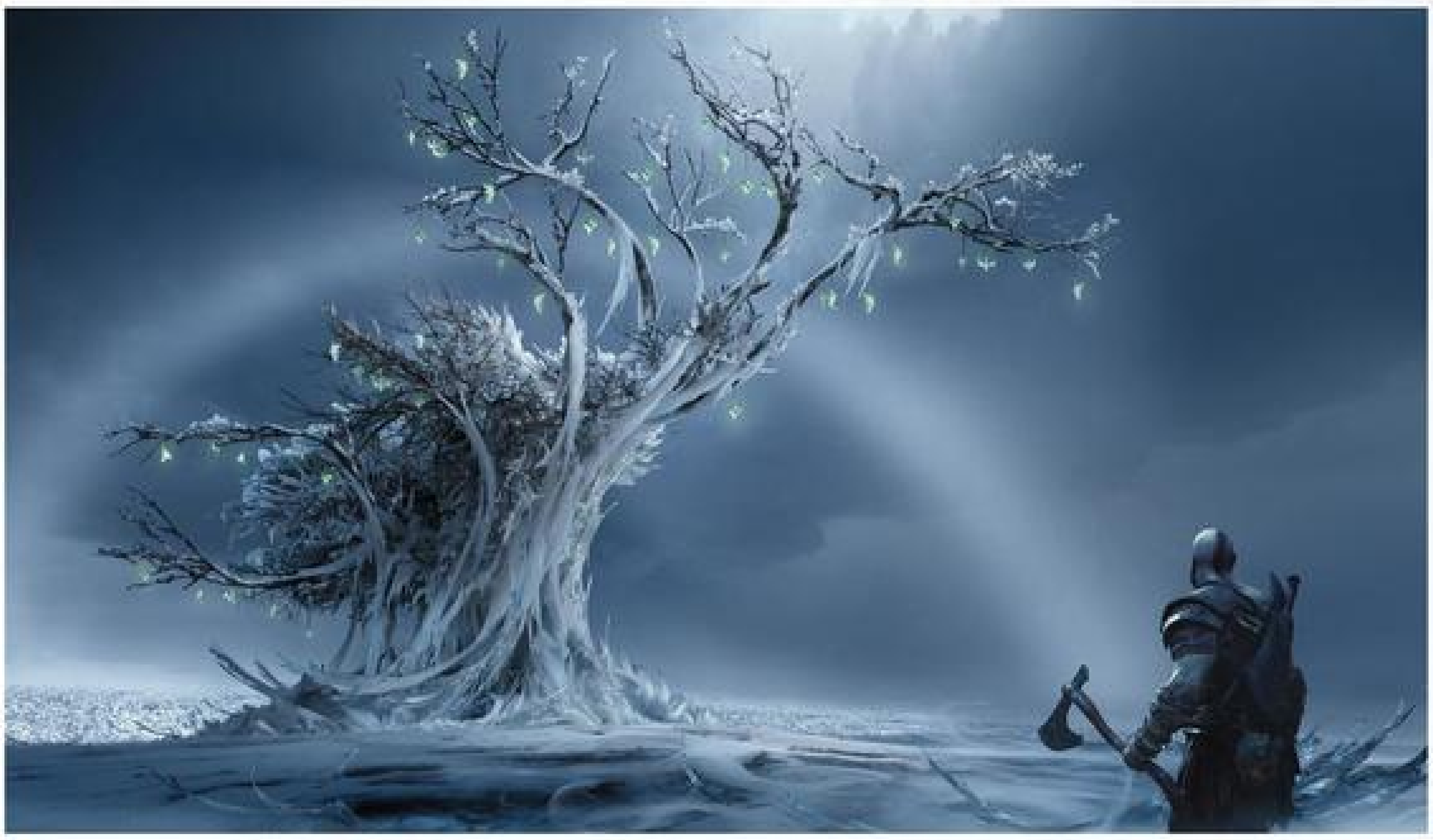
Surtr with his heart missing. Artists: Rafael Grassetti (top); Norris Lin (bottom)

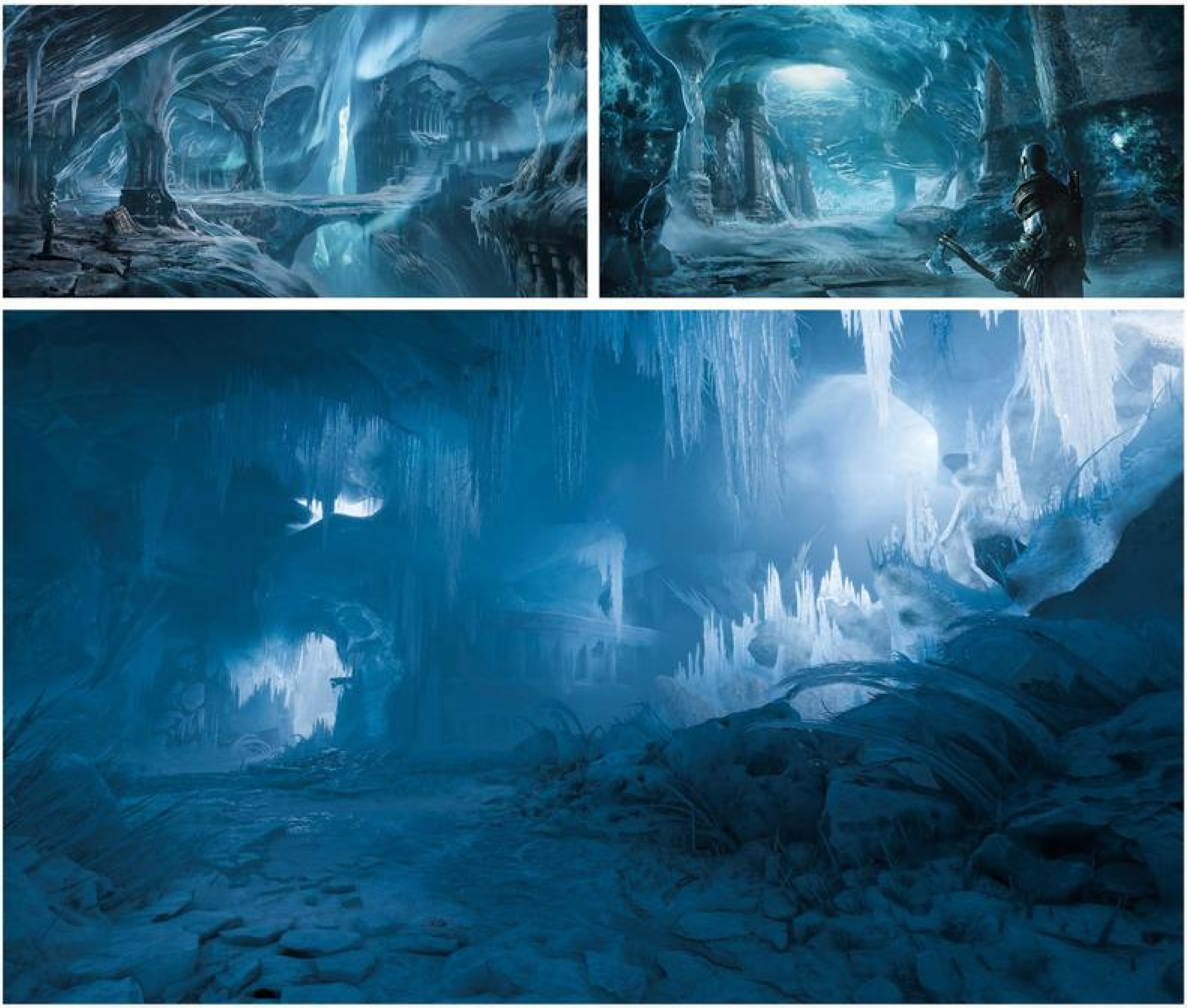




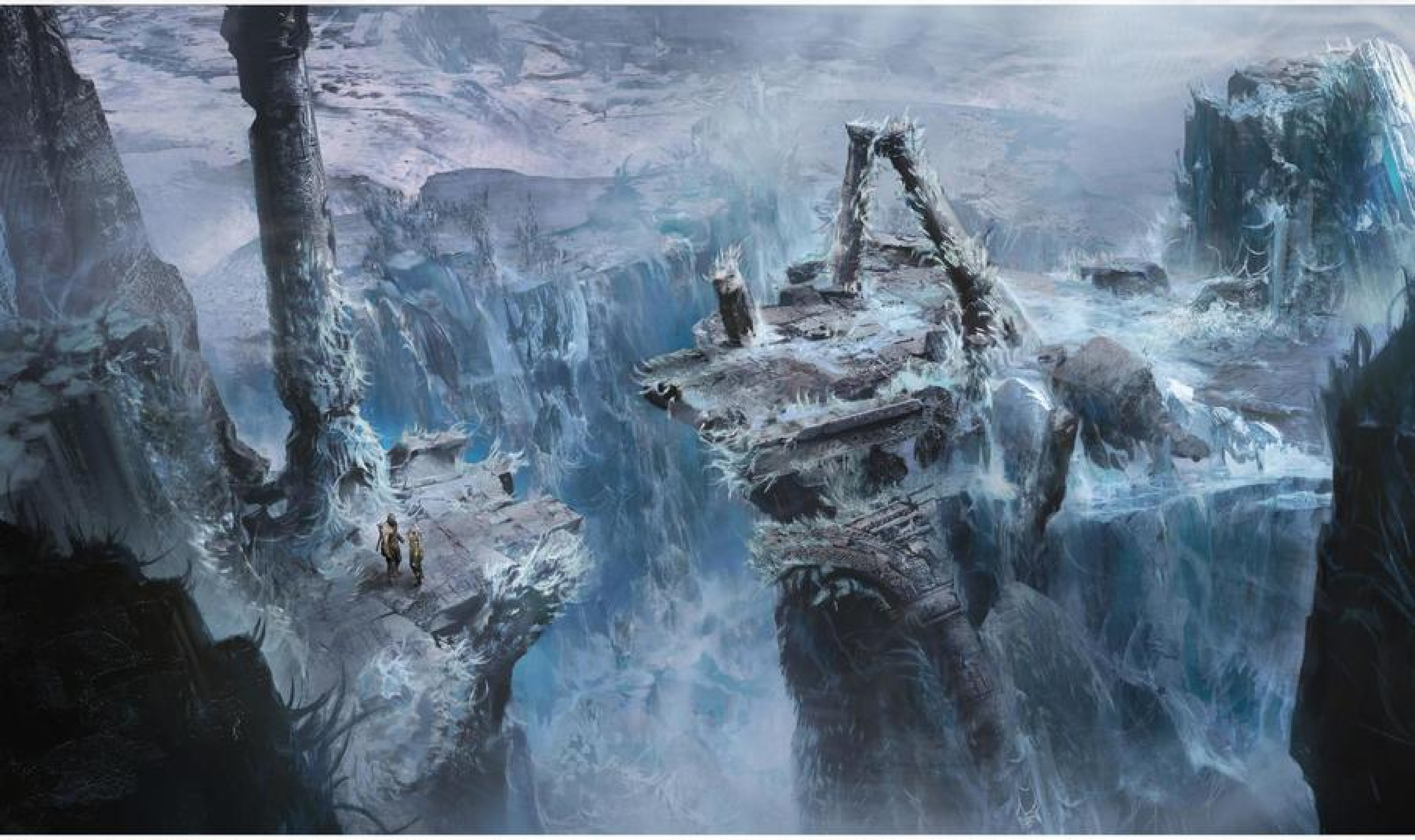
The artists explored a multitude of looks for Surtr, playing against the expectation of a fire giant. Grassetti said, "The way the story developed for him in the game gave us a different way of looking at the challenge—everything surrounded his chest and Sinmara's heart after that, giving an interesting twist and design element for us to play with. The cold heart keeping a fire giant's body controlled made everything fit together."

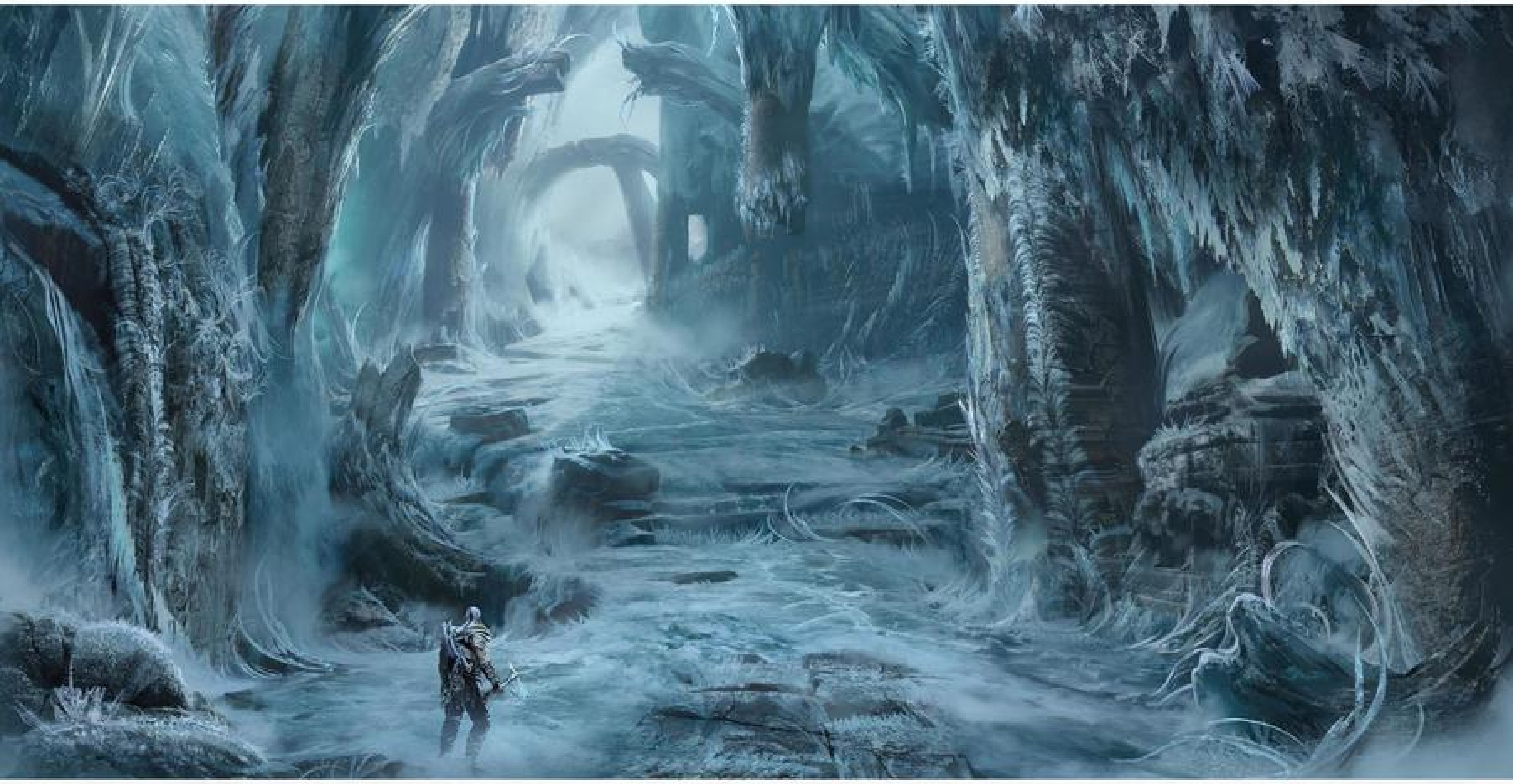
Niflheim is mostly made of ice, so the question for environment art became: how could they make this realm visually interesting for the player? Artist Eric Fitch said, "To differentiate each region, the level compositions had to push unique shape design and silhouettes to stand out from each other. With this direction we were able to get creative with how the ice would form across a variety of landscapes and structures."





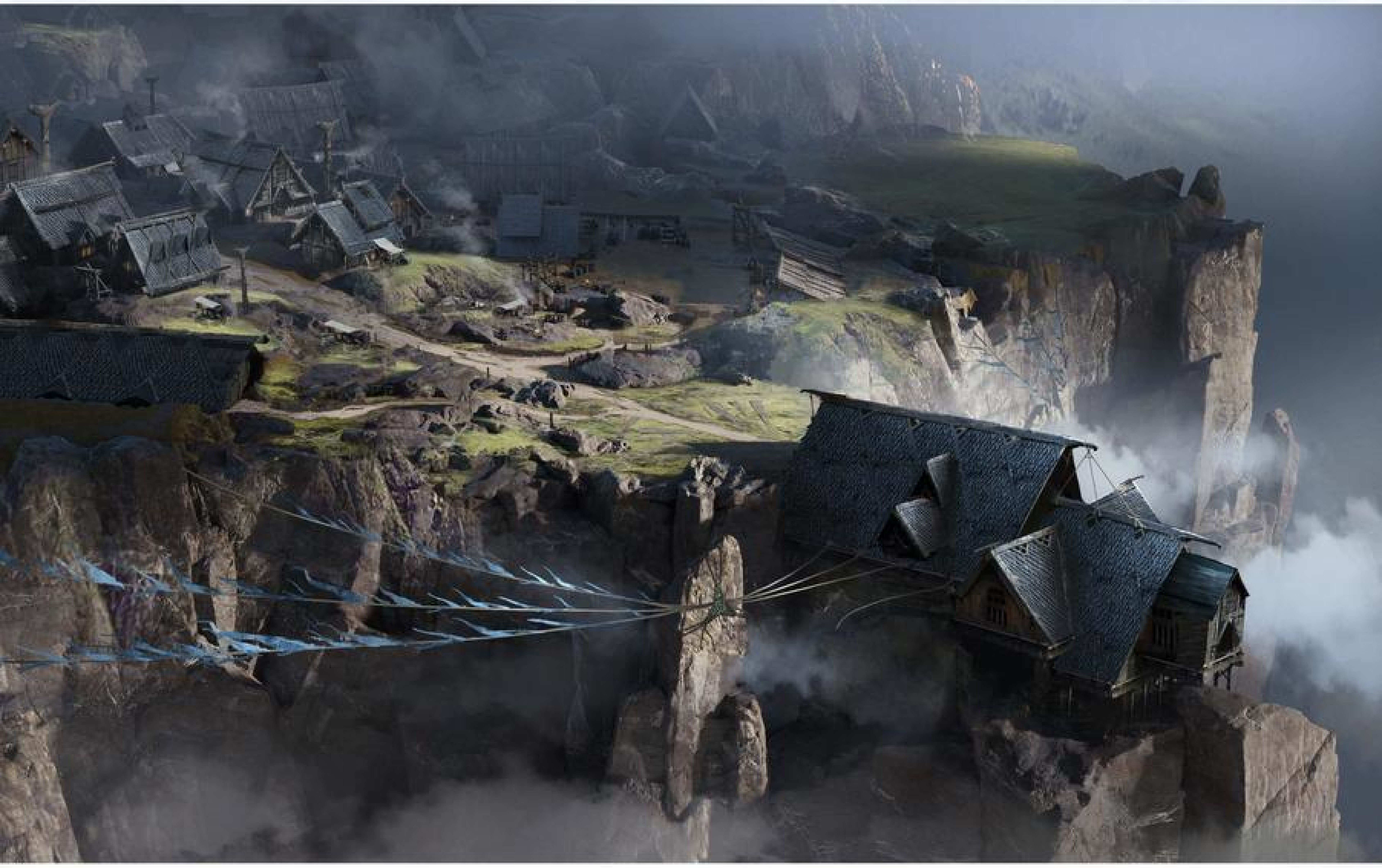
Niflheim ice concepts. Artists: Abe Taraky (top); Norris Lin (middle); Kevin Quinn, Mario Wiechec (bottom)

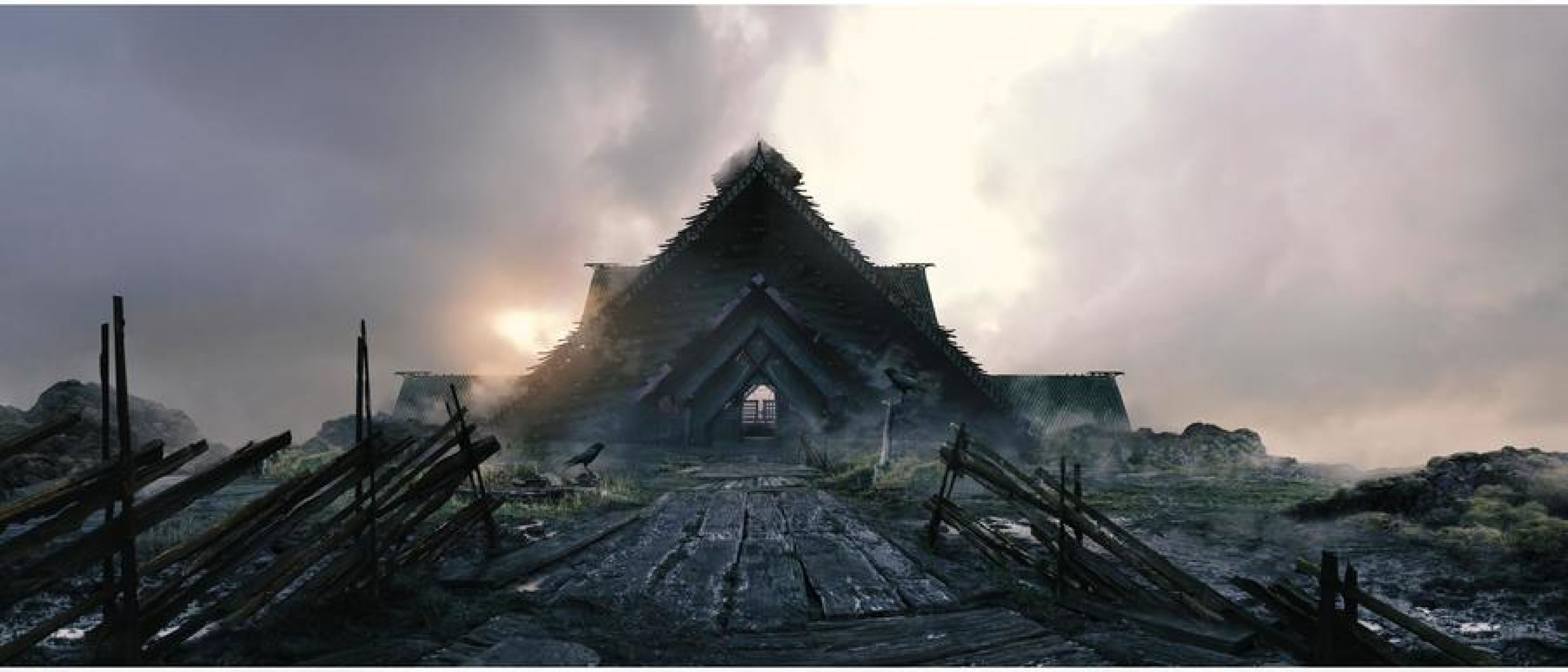




Experimenting with varying icy hues. Artists: Ryan Hong (top); Norris Lin (bottom)

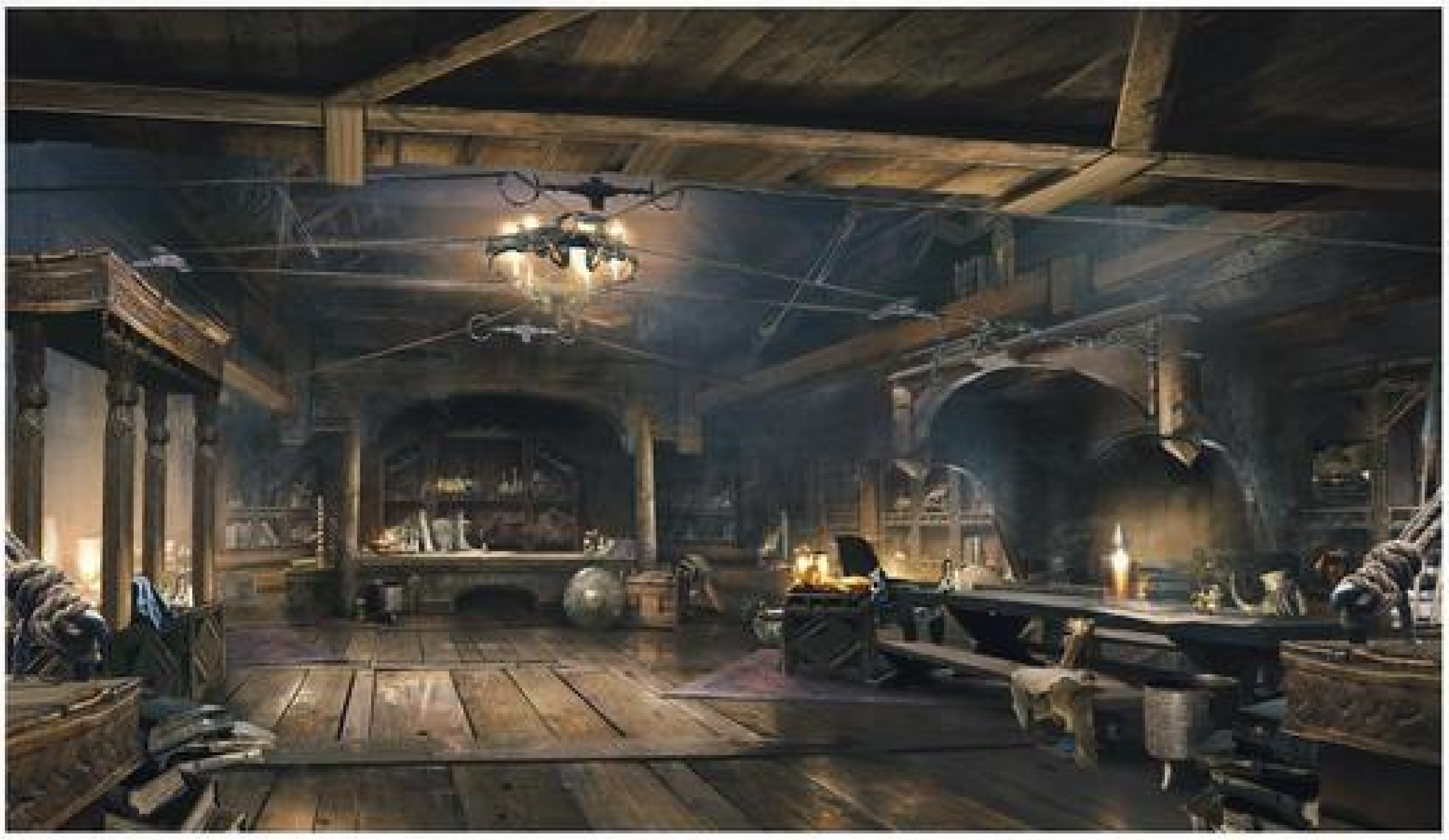
The exterior of Odin's home. Artist: Luke Berliner



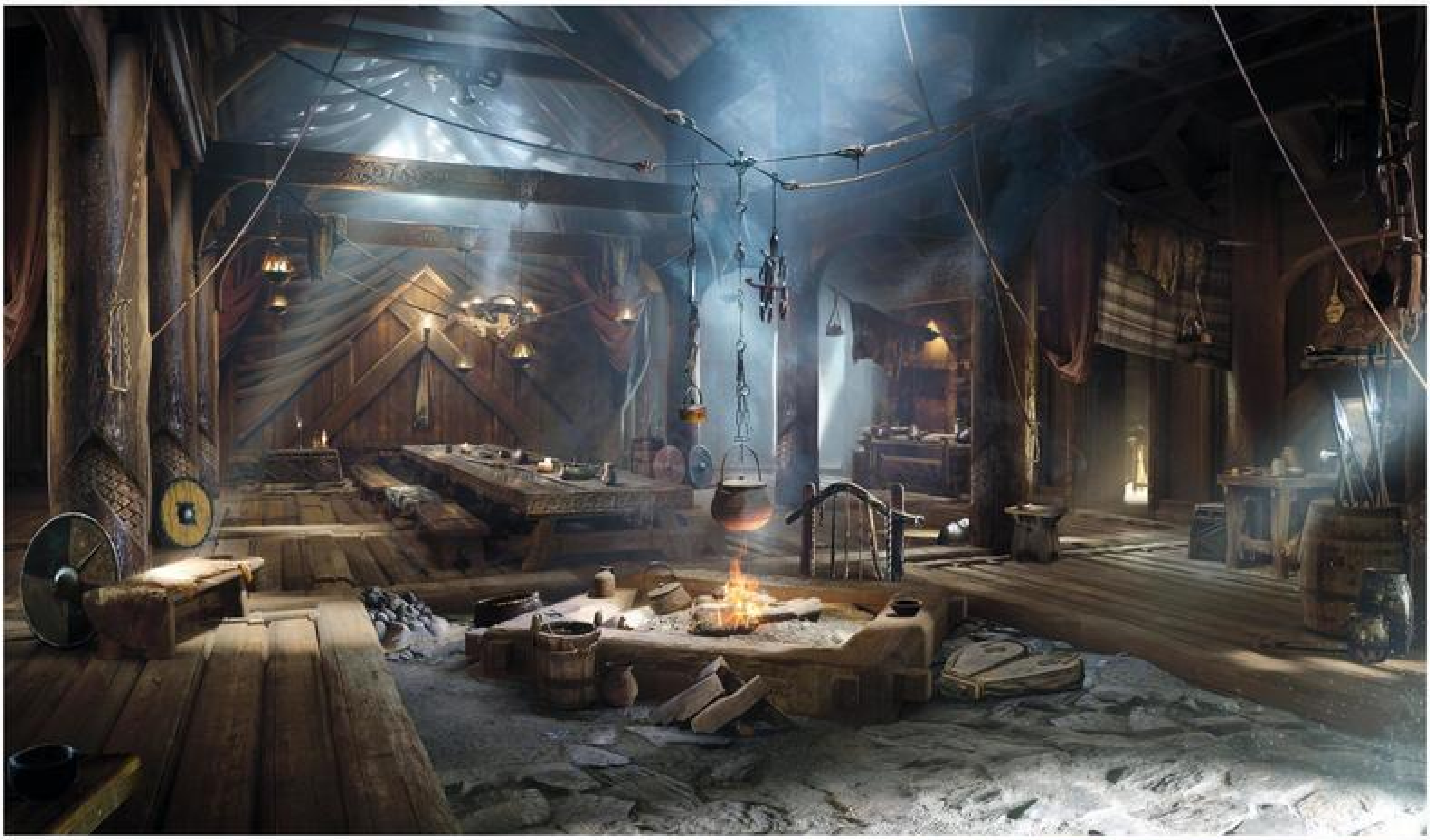


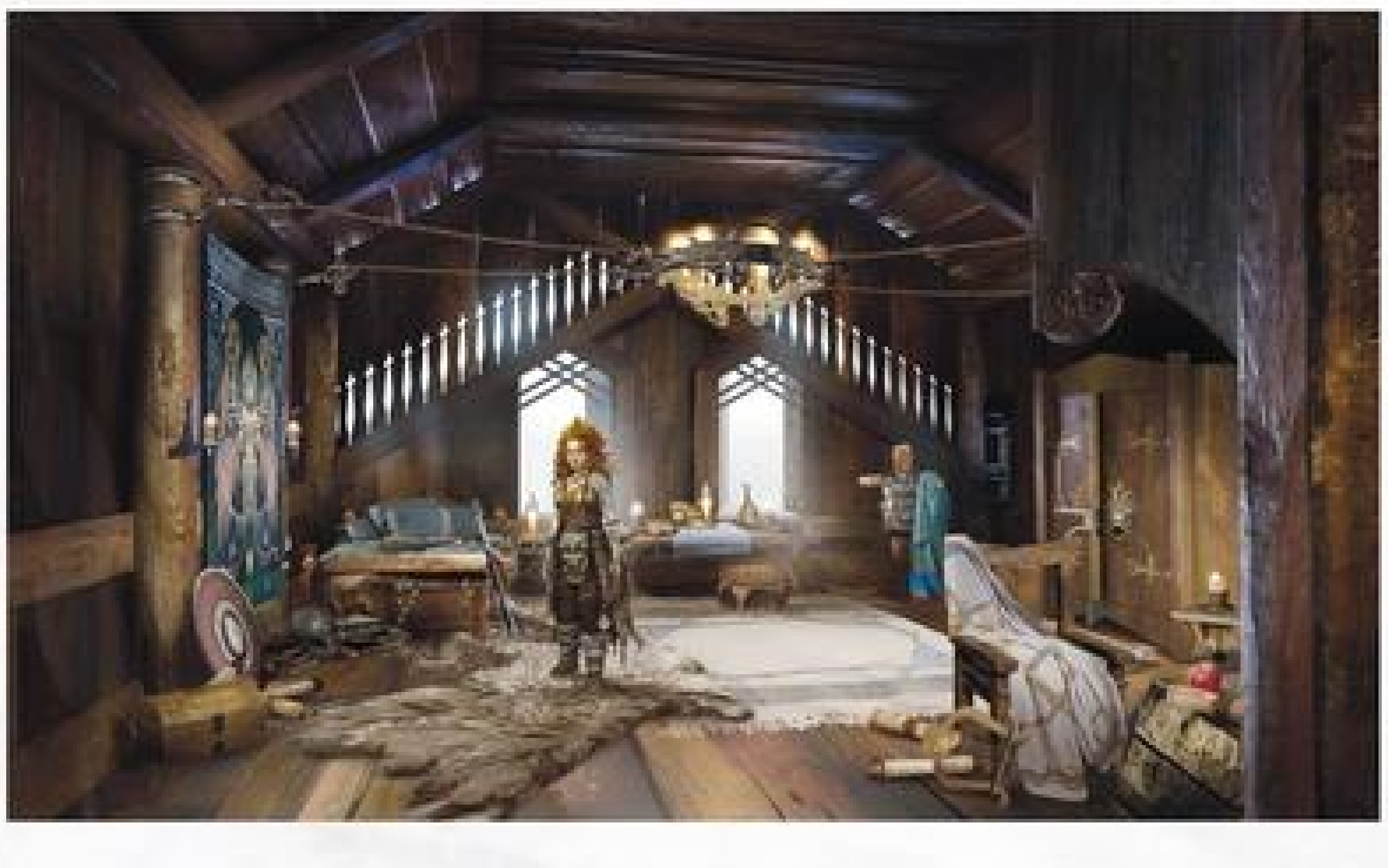
Odin's home stands apart from the people he rules. The environment artists wanted to create the sense that the home was as far to the edge of Asgard as it could be. The whole town sits elevated above Odin's house, serving as a shield. The shingles on the front of the house are curled up to look like the ruffled feathers of a bird, giving it a slightly menacing look.

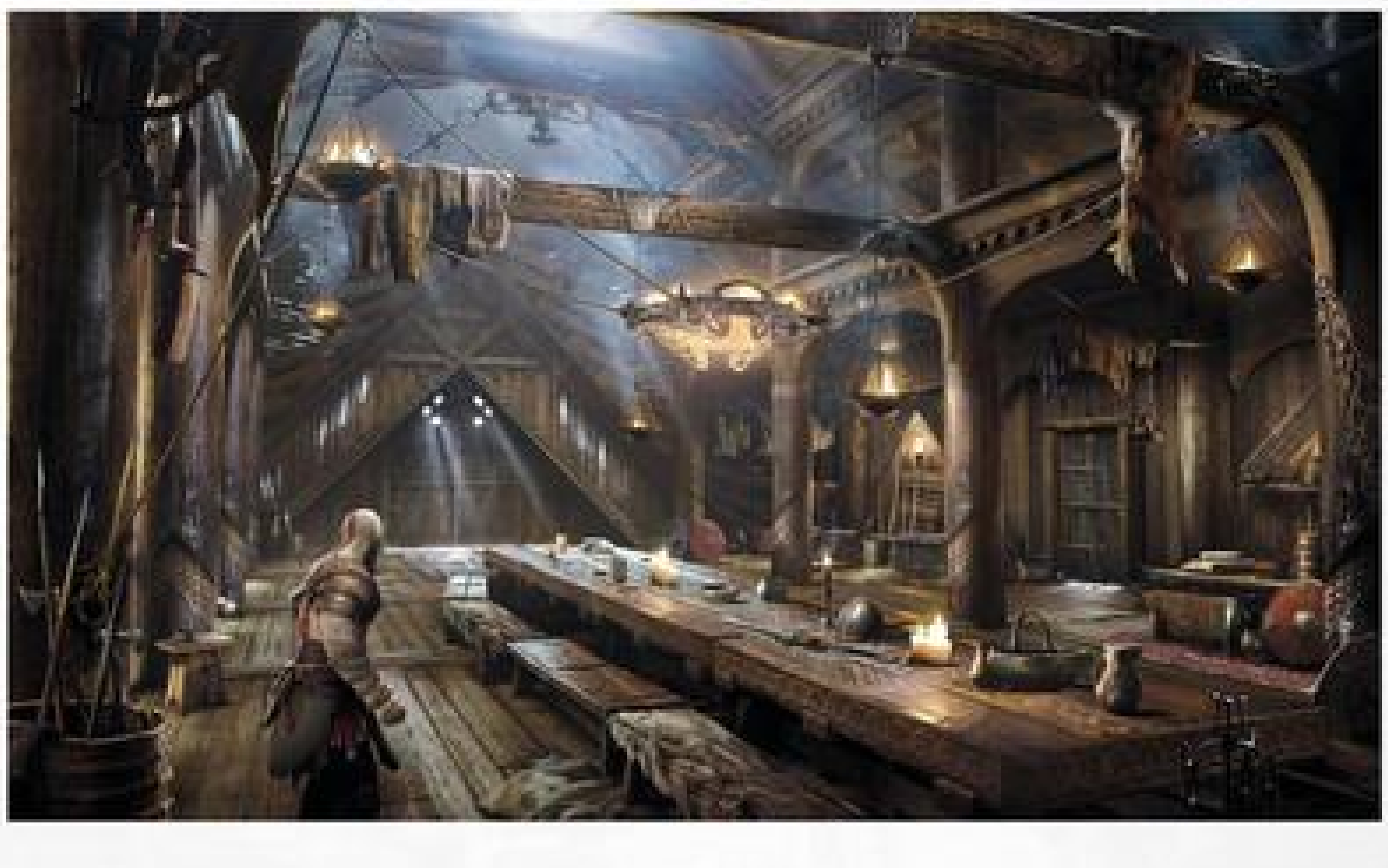
Inside Odin's home. Artists: Luke Berliner (top and bottom left); Norris Lin (middle and bottom right)



Berliner said, "We wanted to give Odin's house this den-like feeling and to have huge contrast with Sindri's house in the Realm between Realms. We gave it that classic Viking longhouse feel but with our own twist. Combining the raven motif with the simple triangle shape—we worked as much of that into every space as we could. We also pushed the set dressing to show the mess being made by those living there and visiting."

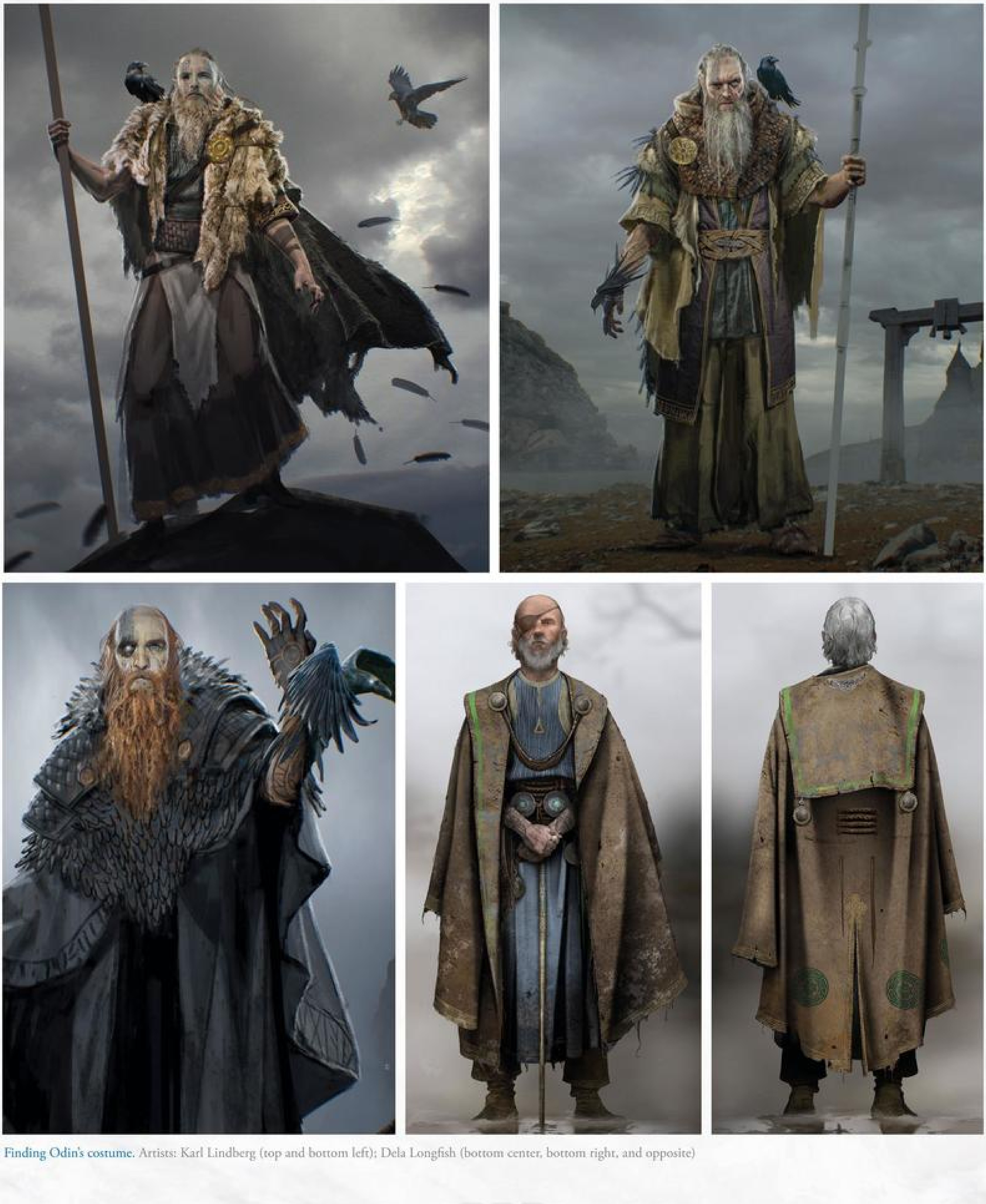






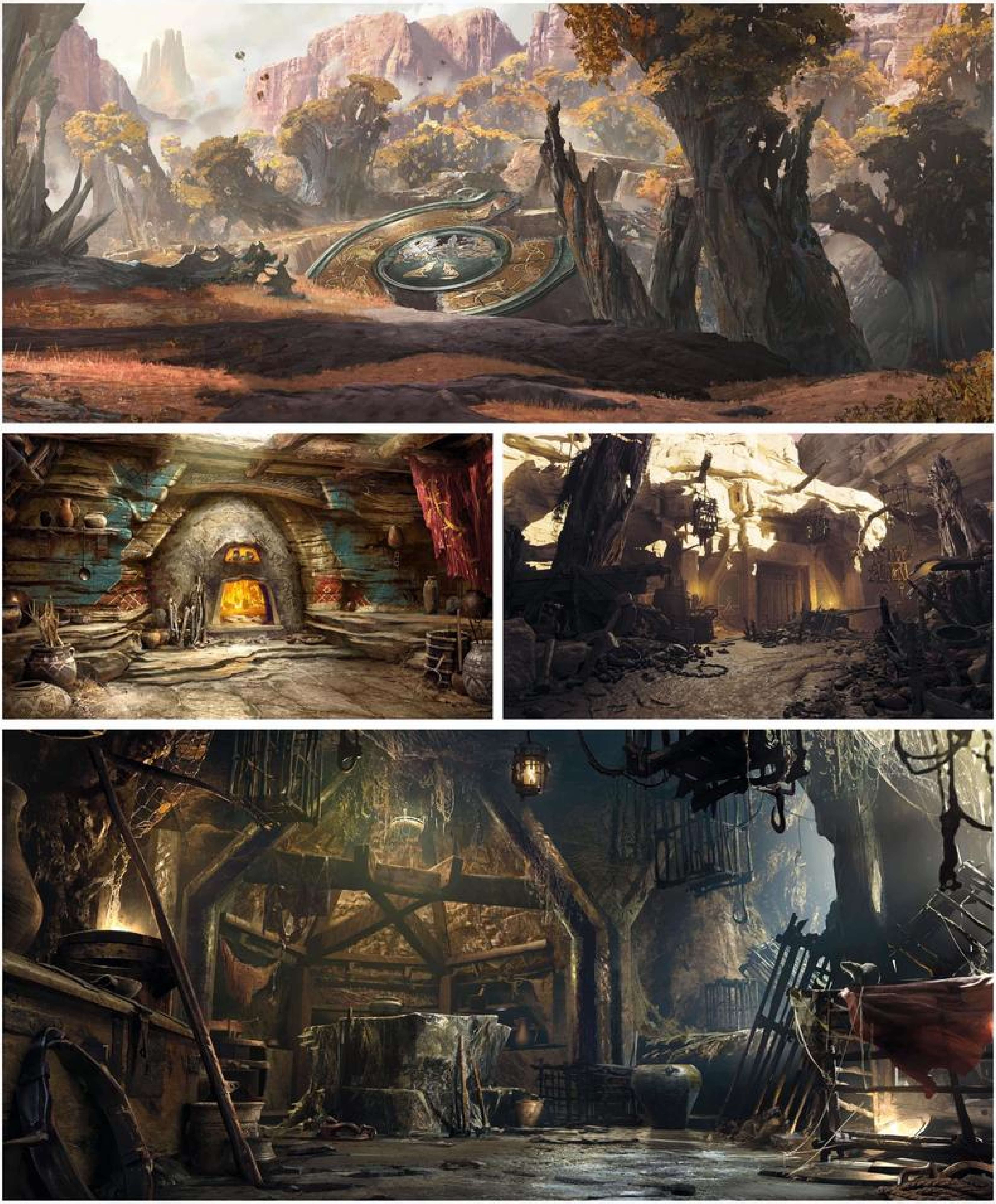
ODIN

Kratos has battled a number of all-powerful deities, but never anyone like Odin. "We wanted a different type of foe than the ones Kratos has been used to fighting. Odin is a god whose manipulating of magic and people is deadlier than any sword. As his design evolved, we leaned more into a wizard-like feel. His look was meant to be unassuming in order to conceal his cunning and deadly nature," Longfish said.



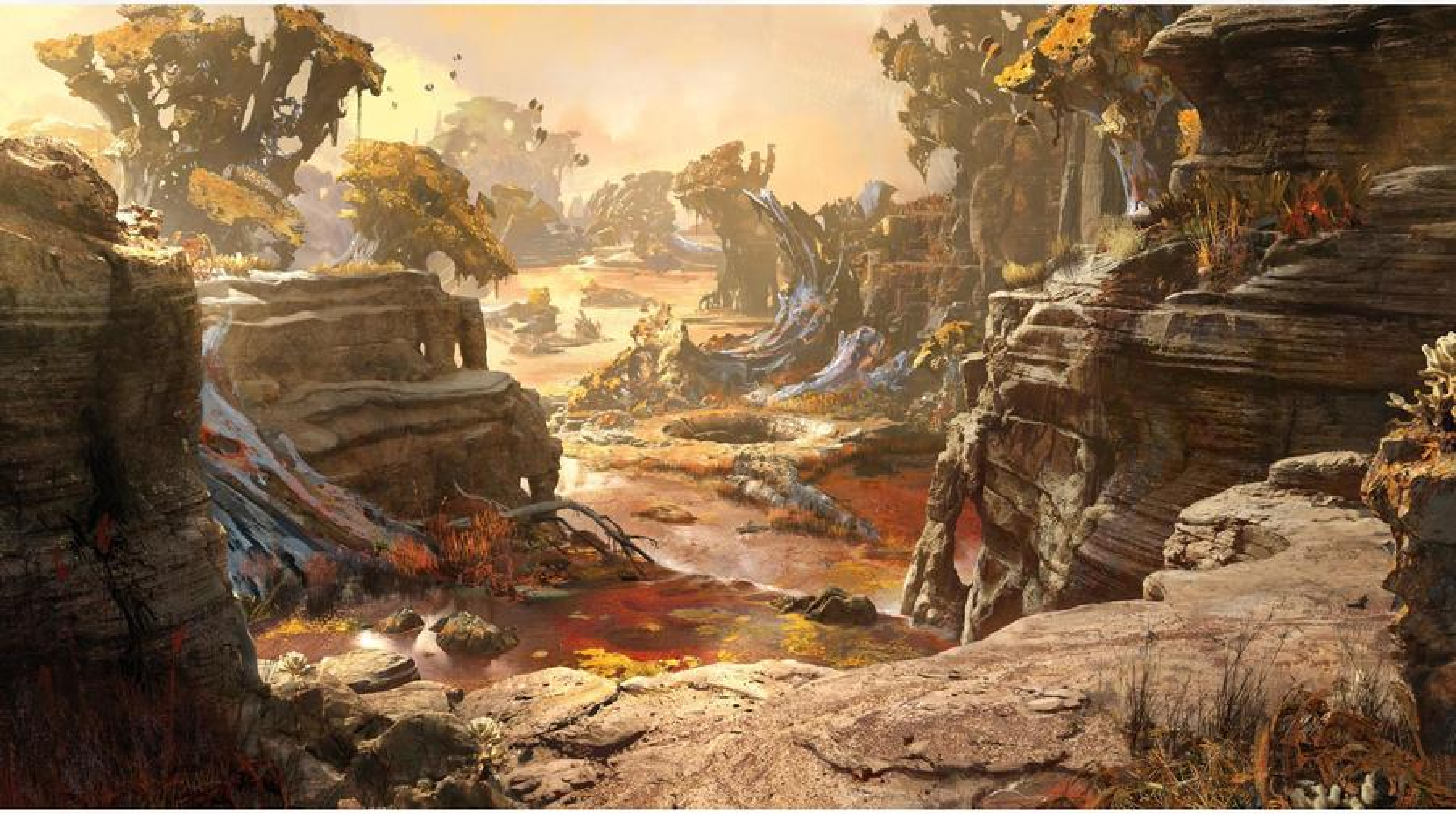
Finding Odin's costume. Artists: Karl Lindberg (top and bottom left); Dela Longfish (bottom center, bottom right, and opposite)

Gryla's house interior. Artists: Matteo Marjoram (top); Norris Lin (middle left and bottom); Dan McKim, Sukru Gilman, Kevin Quinn (middle right)



Jötunheim leads players on an environmental journey, moving from the lush Ironwood forest to dead marshlands with storytelling woven throughout. The team used a blend of photogrammetry, hand sculpting, and procedural tools to showcase an alien yet familiar land of the giants. These concepts feature hints at the giants' scale, visual links between Angrboda and her grandmother, and *God of War* callbacks. This all leads to the "Jack and the Beanstalk"–inspired home of Gryla.

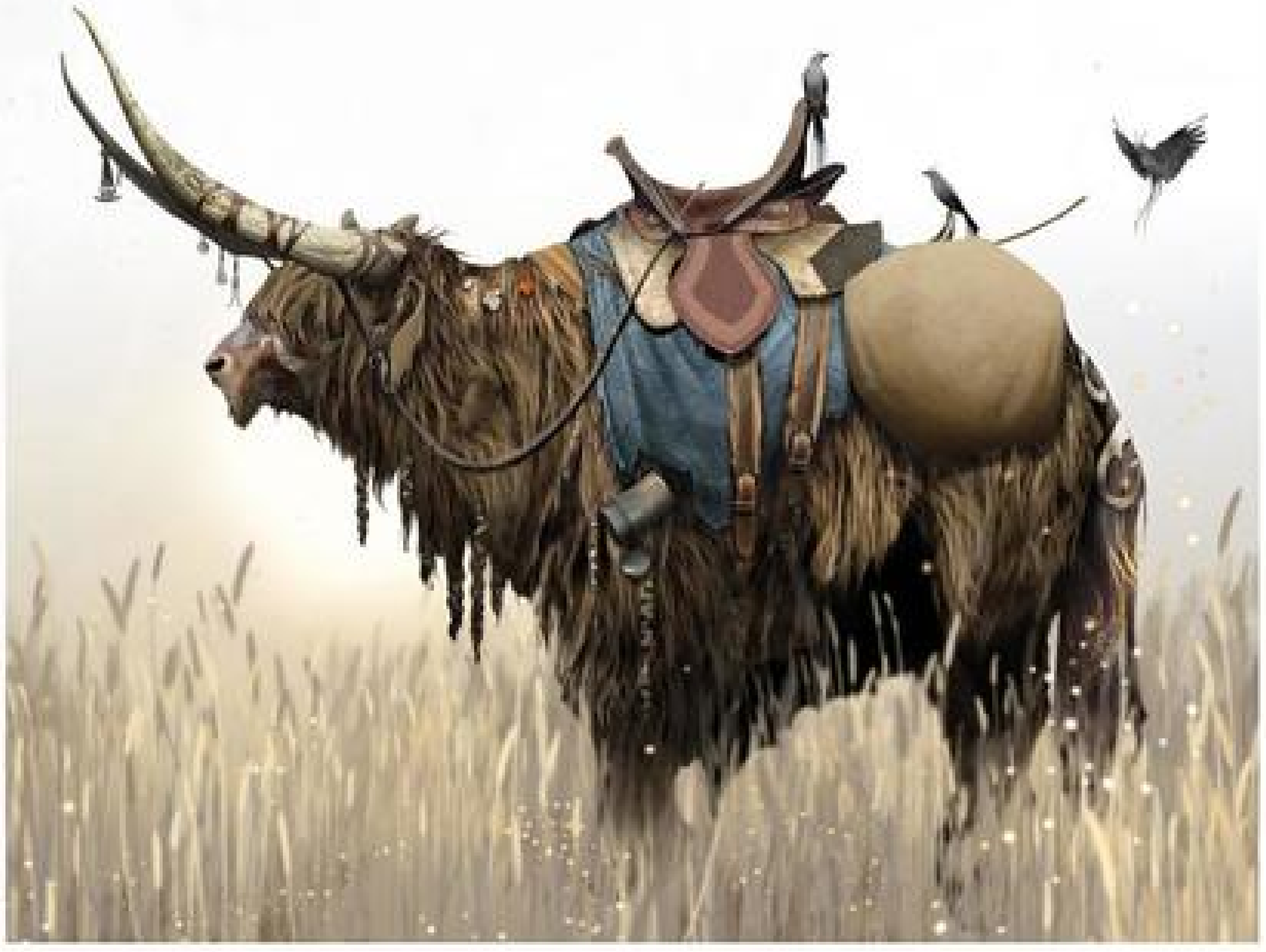
Experimenting with scale in Jötunheim. Artists: Norris Lin (top); Sukru Gilman, Kevin Quinn (bottom)

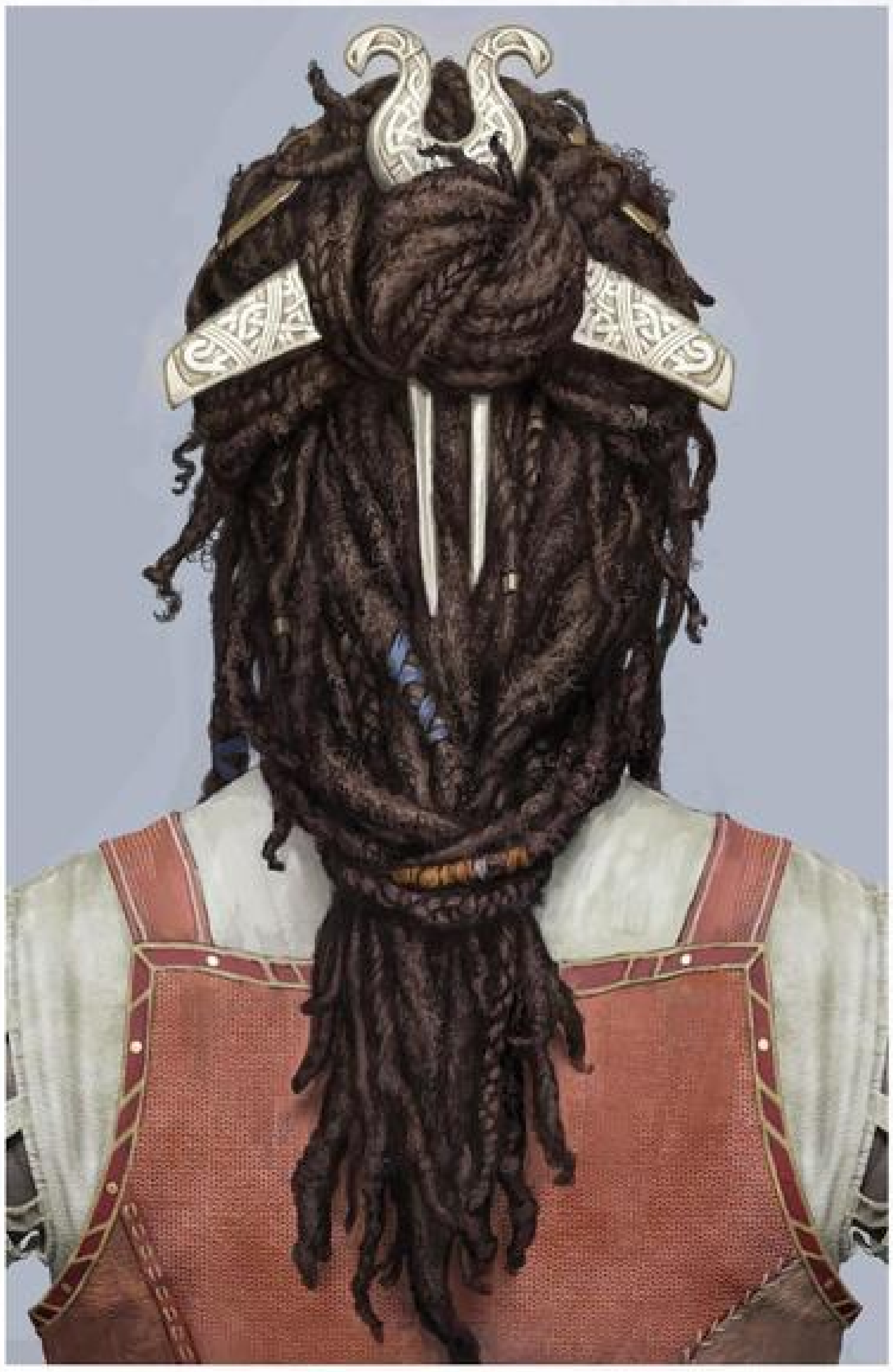


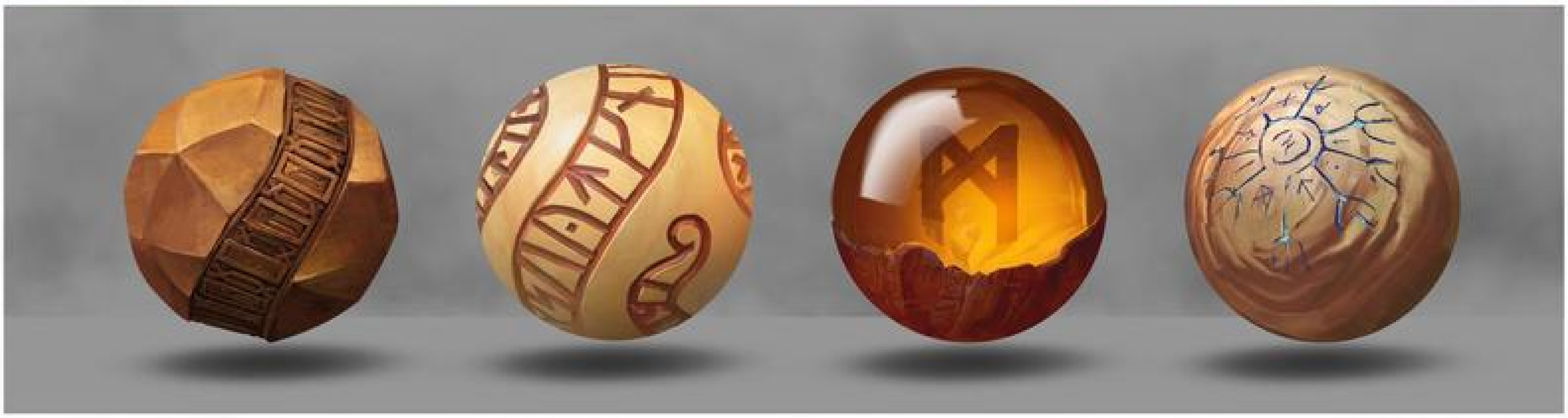
ANGRBODA

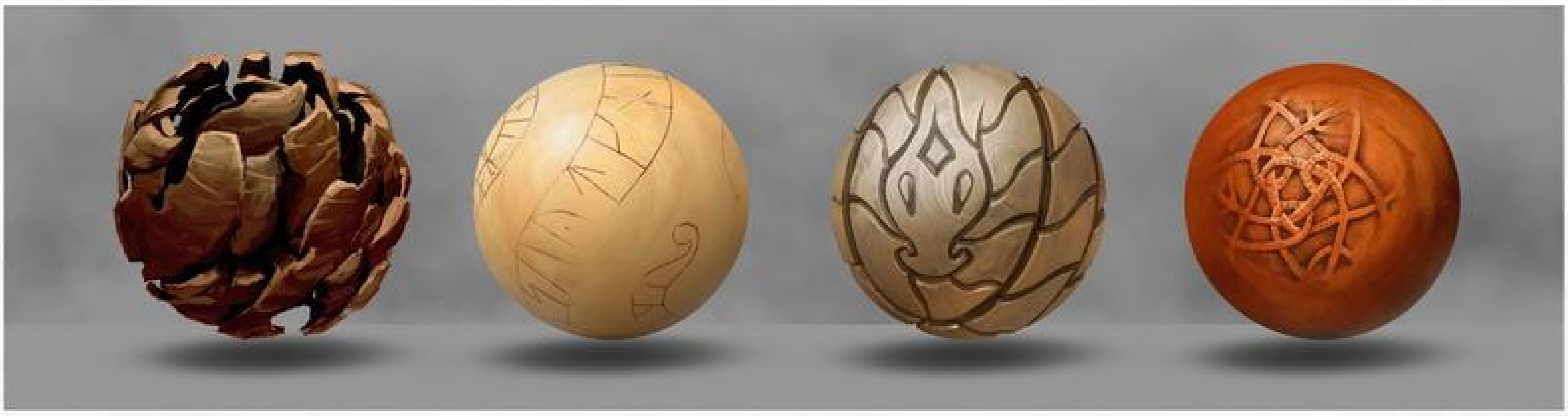
Despite the brutality of Thor's attack on the giants, survivors do indeed exist. Angrboda is one of these tragic few. She travels the landscape of Jötunheim with her loyal steed and friend, Jall, a shaggy four-legged beast. Longfish said, "As one of the last surviving Jötnar, she represented an aspect that no other character in-game could for Atreus—a connection to giants and that part of his family."

The small amber spheres illustrated below are vessels of her ancestors that Angrboda carries. "The souls are housed in Jötnar marbles made from precious materials blessed with depictions of the giant's personality," Kennedy said.





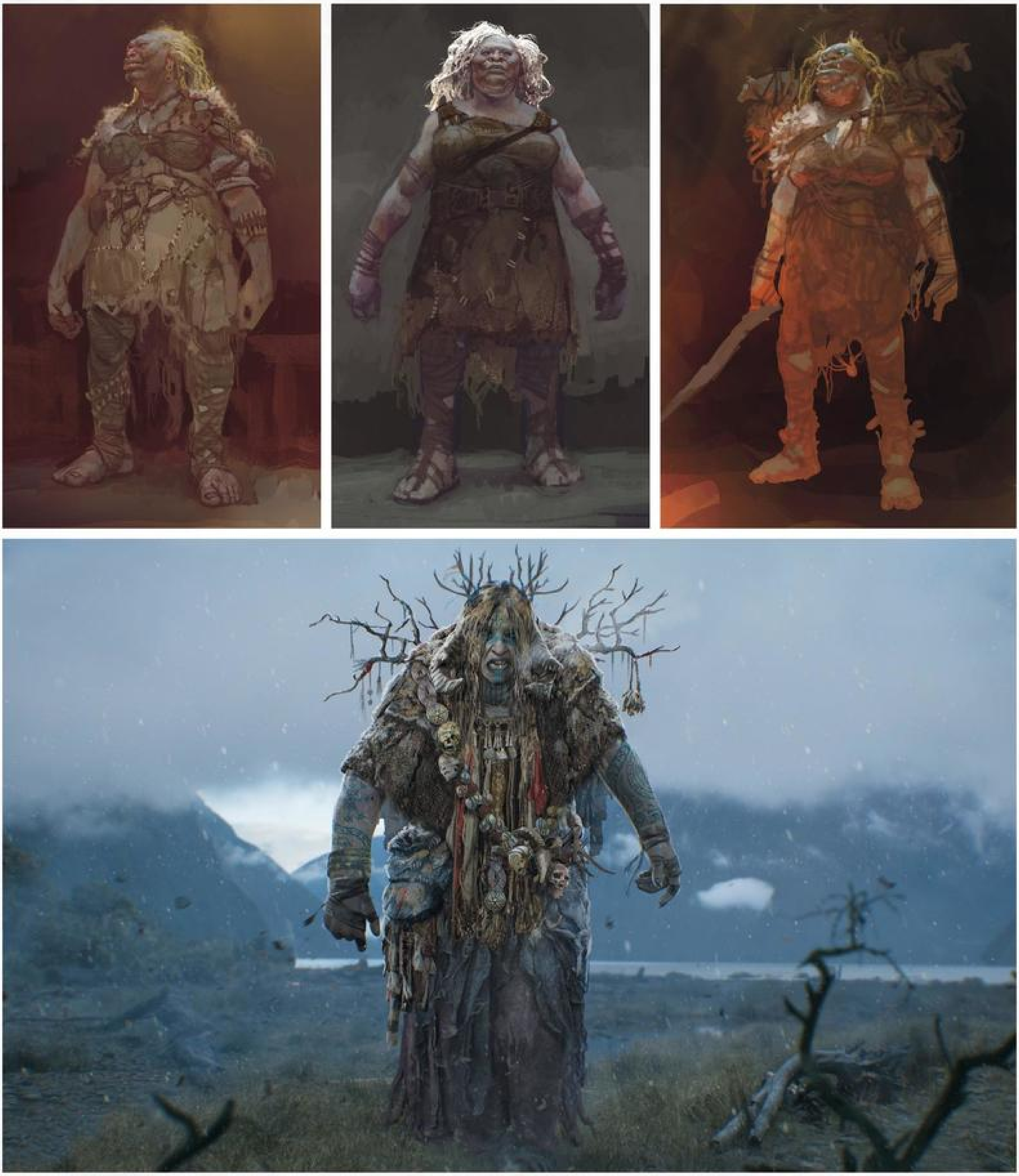




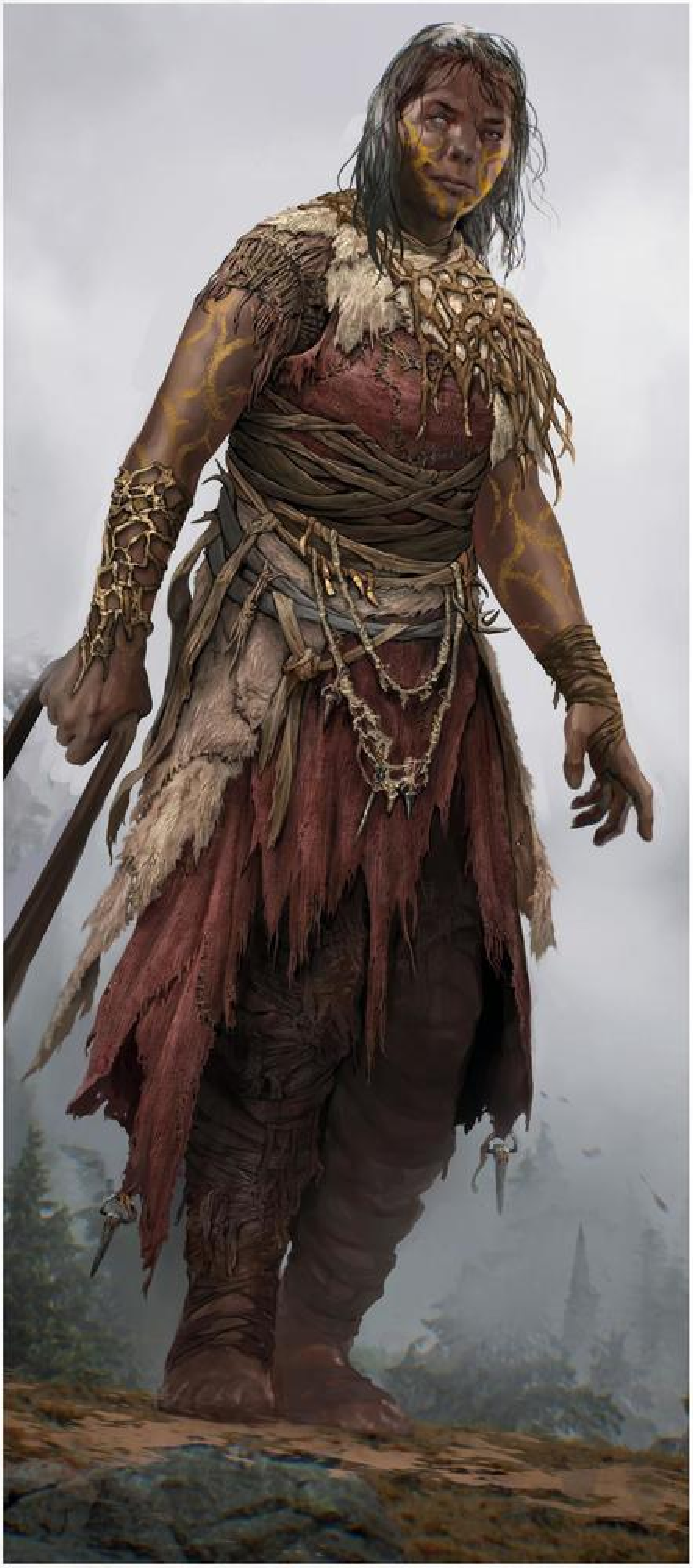
Vessels of the ancestors. Artists: Dela Longfish (top left); Rafael Grassetti (opposite and top right); Joseph Kennedy (bottom)

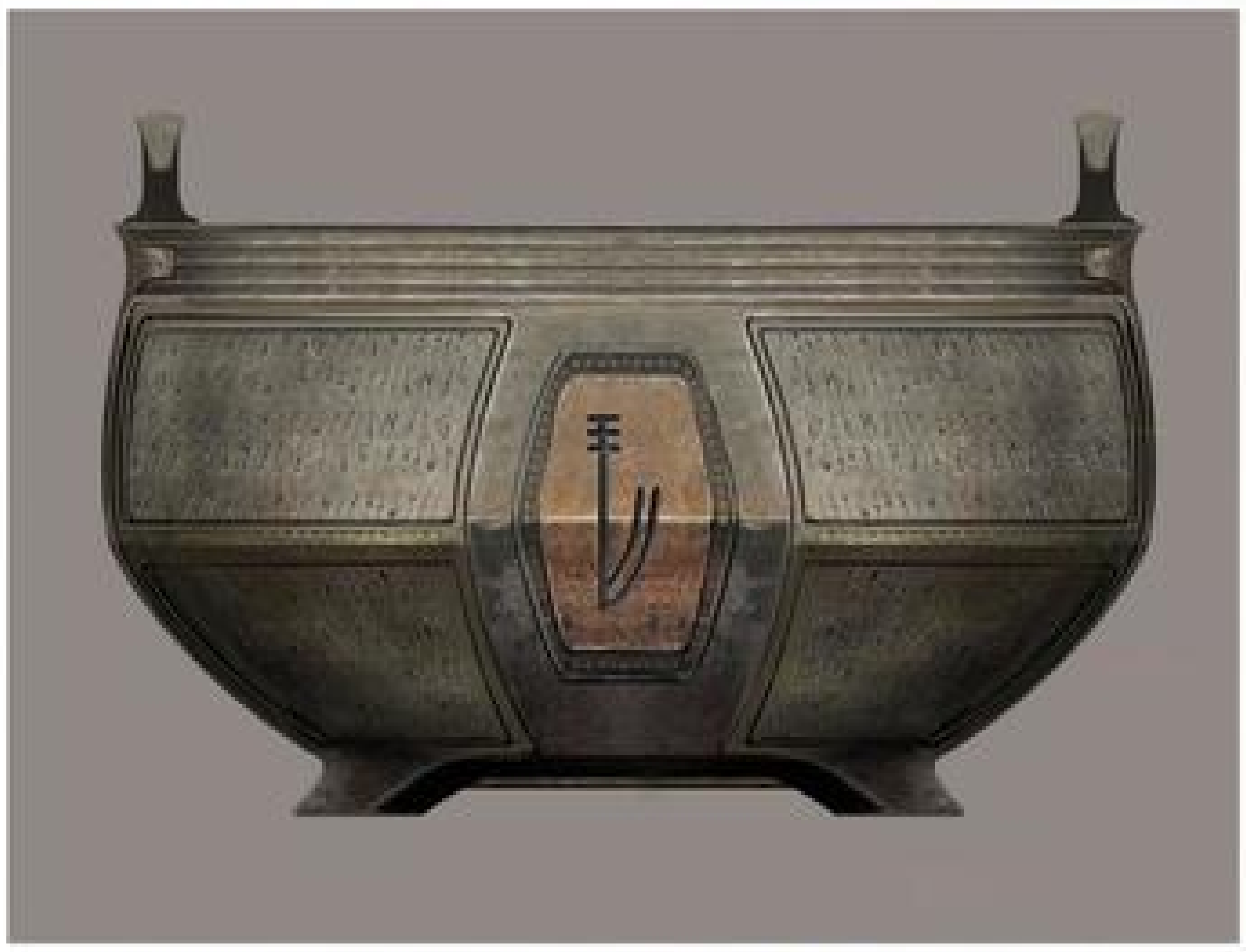
GRYLA

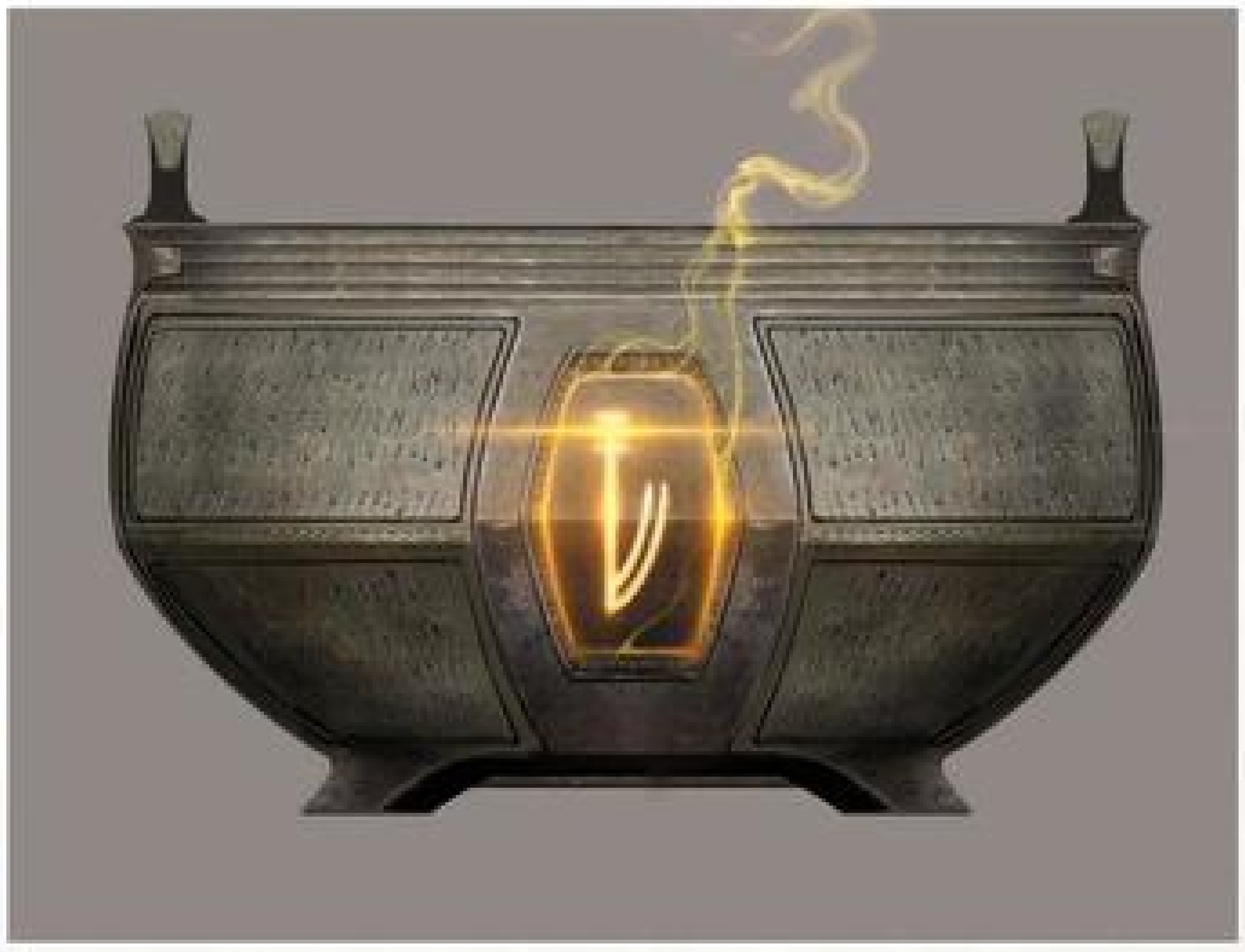
"After the end of *God of War*, we saw all the giants were gone, so it was great to find out there were still some remaining that we would get a chance to design," Longfish said. "Vance and Karl did some early exploration on pulling from the mythology and exploring different options for Gryla's costume. As the process moved along, we worked back and forth with the character modeling department to refine and adjust her look to arrive at a final design."



Explorations for Gryla. Artists: Vance Kovacs (top); Karl Lindberg (bottom)

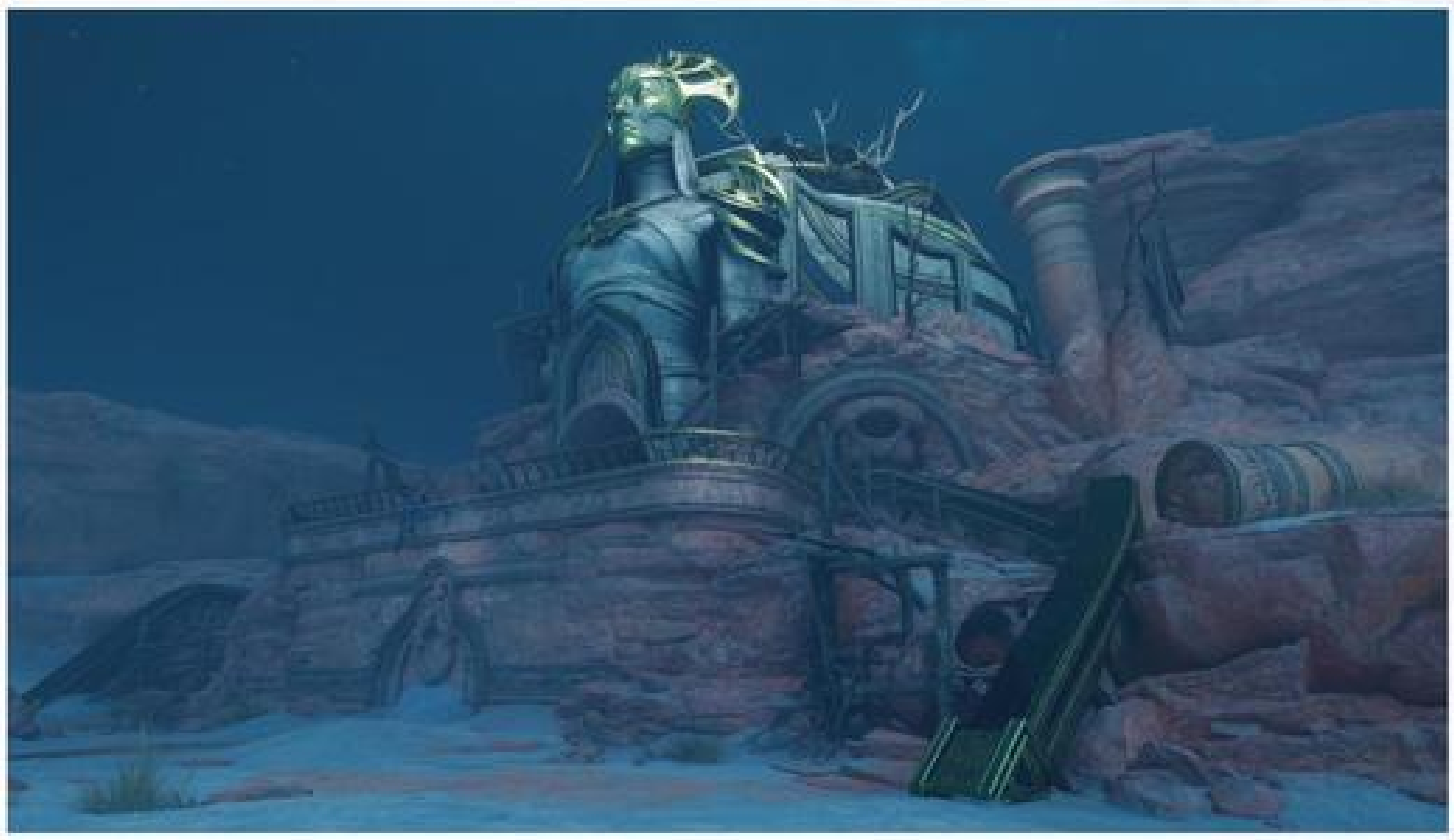


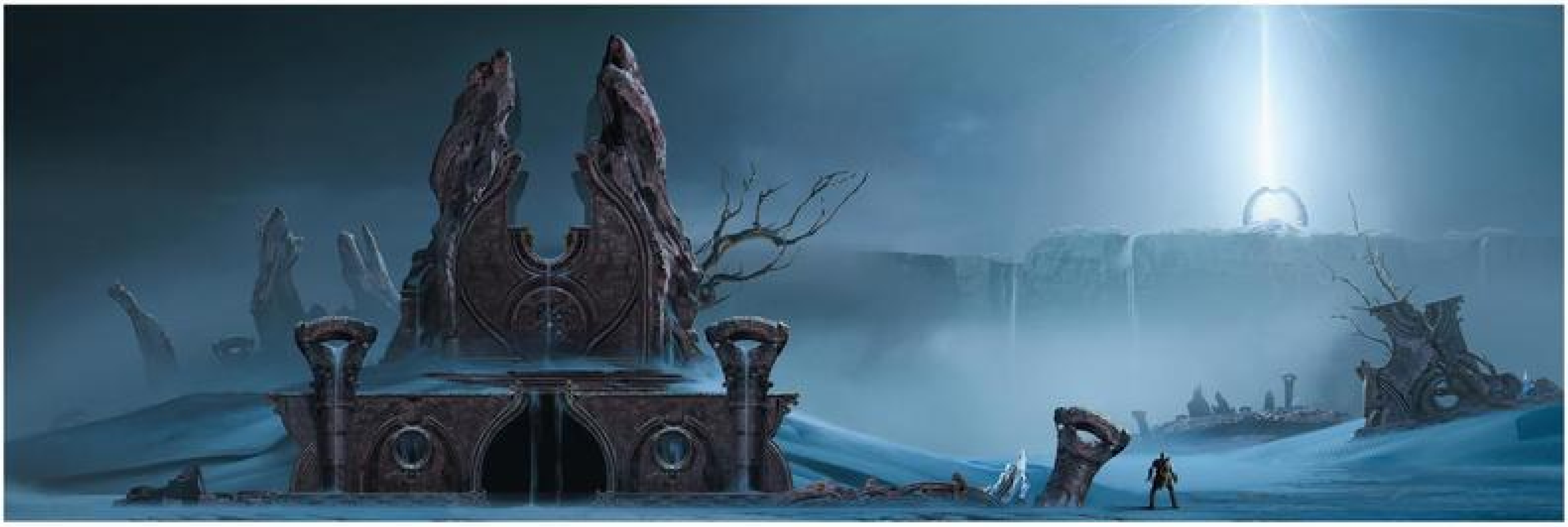


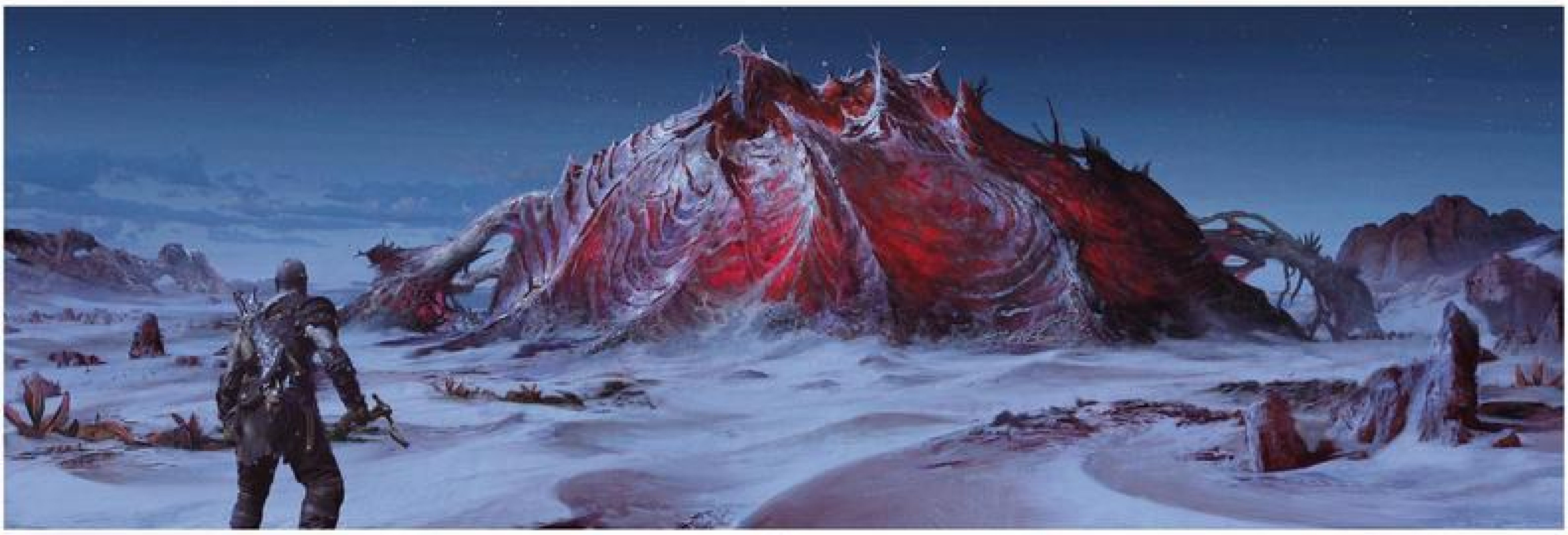


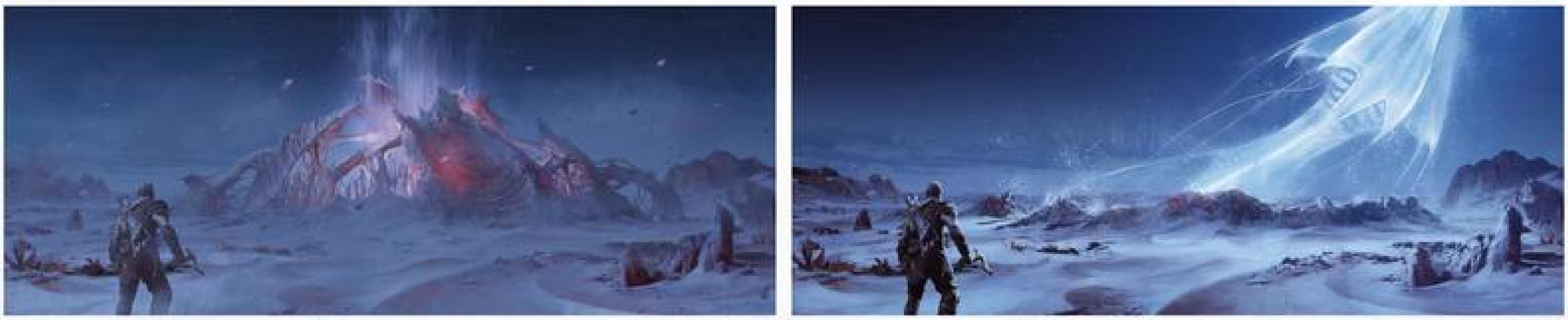
Artists: Yefim Kligerman (left and bottom right); Dela Longfish, Rafael Grassetti (top right)

Freyr has strong ties to Alfheim. The Vanir helped the Light Elves control the Light of Alfheim, and in gratitude, the Elves gave him residence in their realm. The artists wanted to illustrate that relationship further with a statue of Freyr. This point of interest shows how the Elves revere Freyr and draws a close connection between Vanaheim and Alfheim. Crossover in the architectural design language further brings the two realms together.

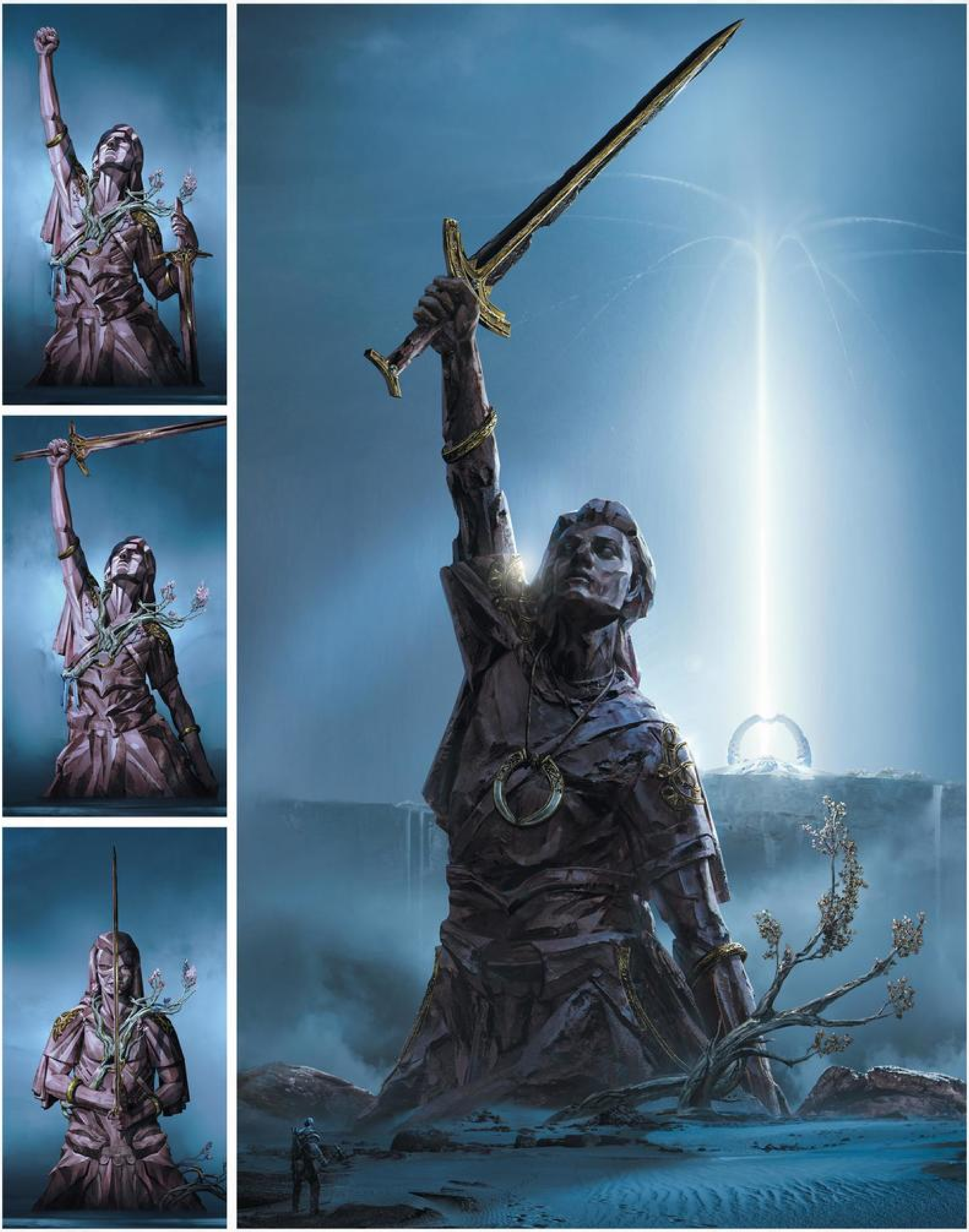








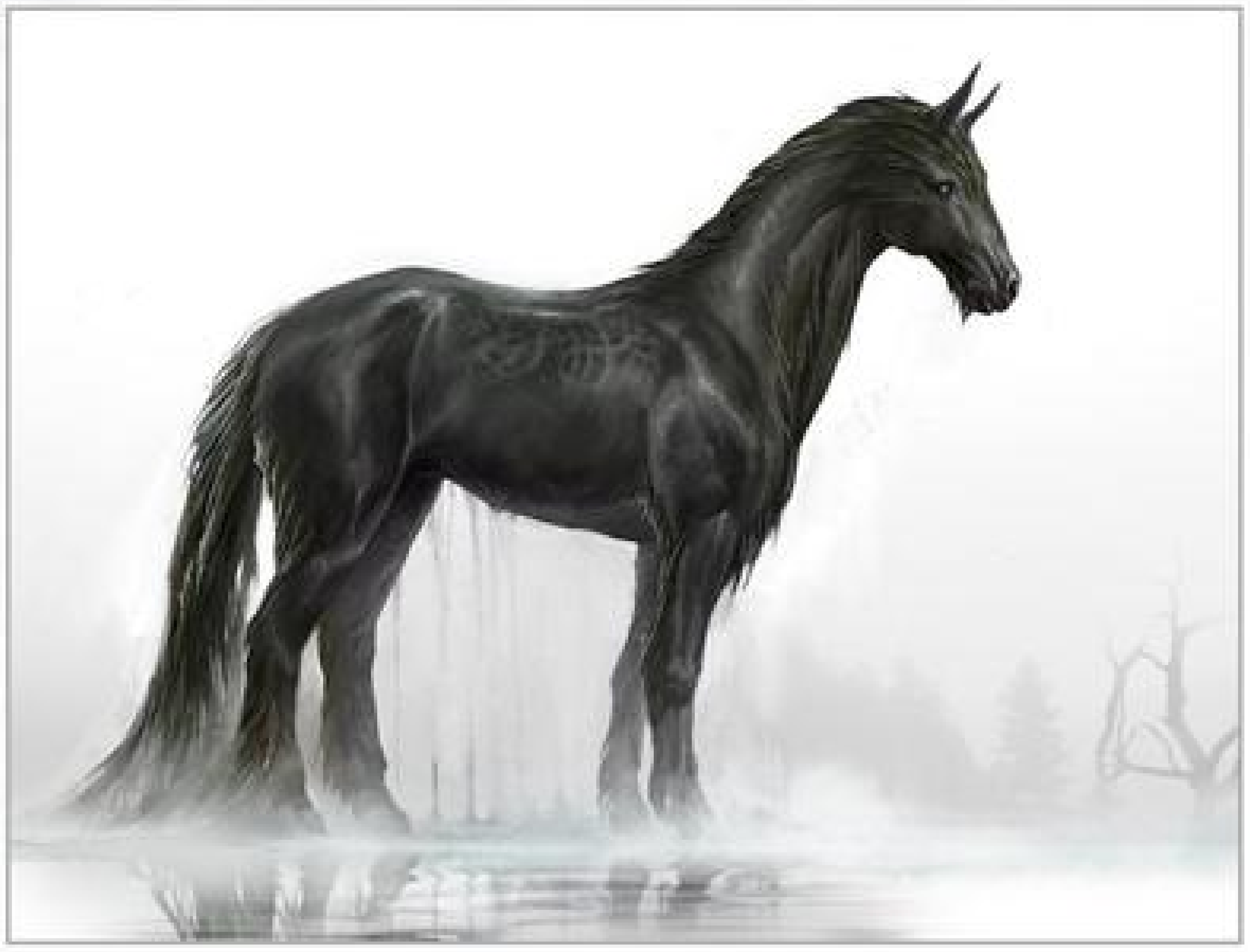
The barrens of Alfheim. Artists: Urban McLafferty, Myriah Higgins, Katie Houston (top); Abe Taraky (middle); Ryan Hong (middle and bottom)

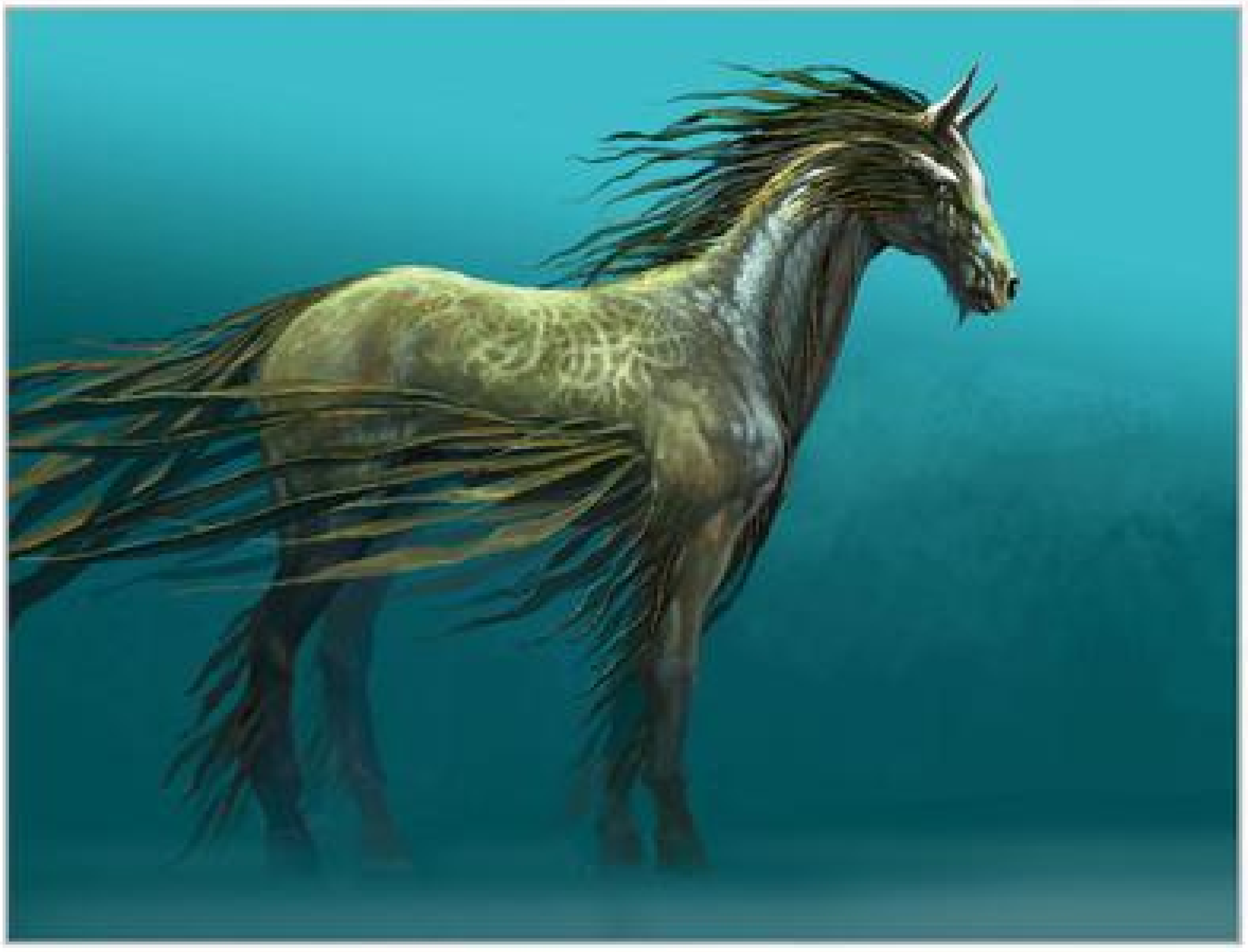


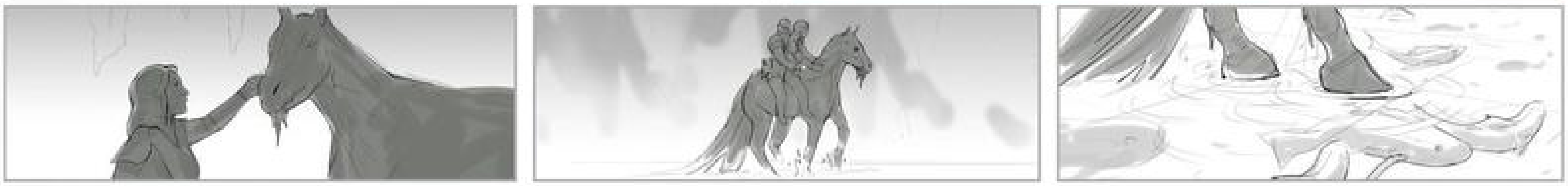
Designs for Freyr's statue. Artist: Abe Taraky

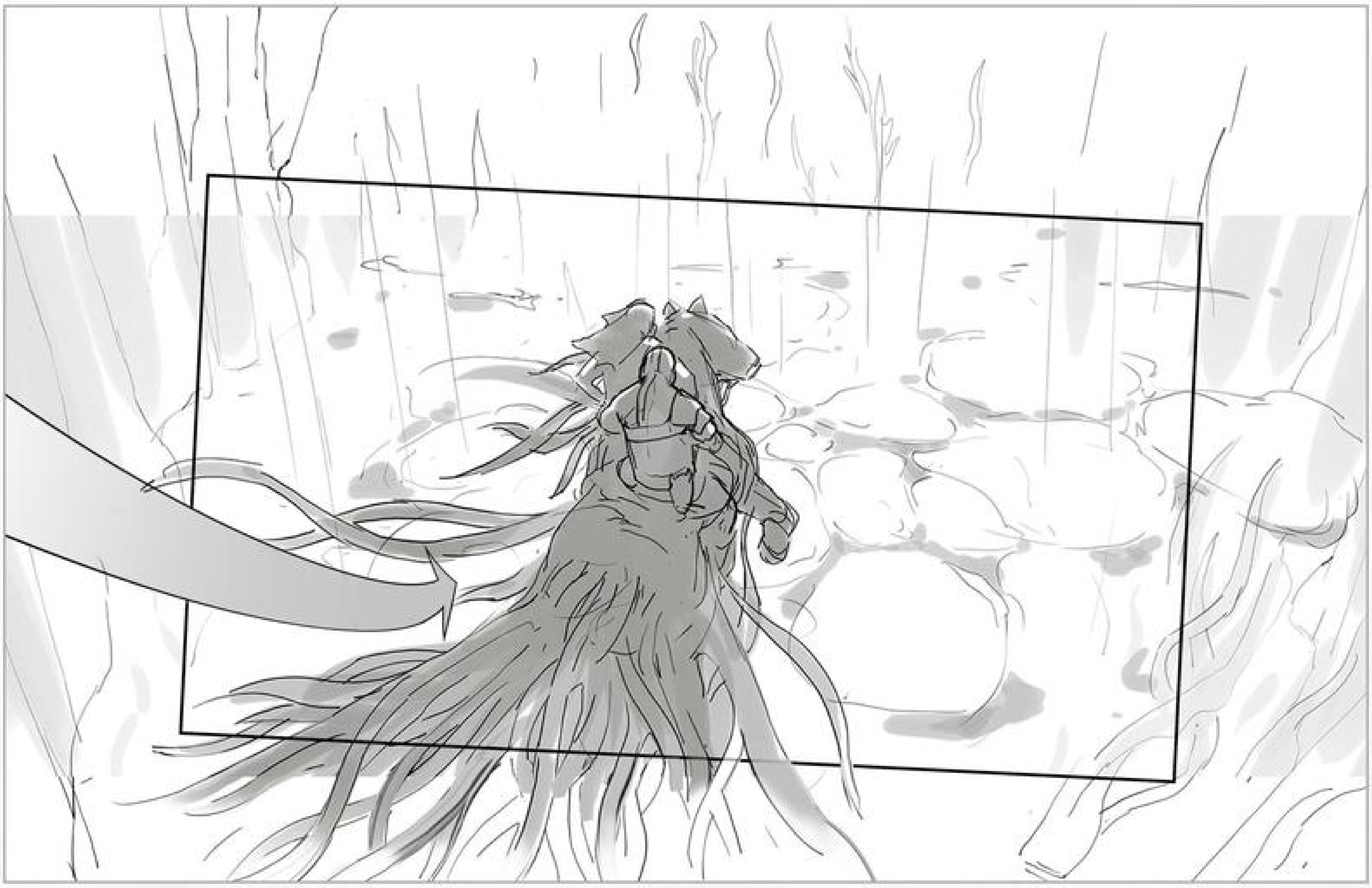
KELPIE AND THE NORNIR

"Storyboards are a very important tool used to capture the mood of a sequence for our game. Iterative illustrations of combat sequences help find the 'fun' and timing of an encounter or boss battle," Kennedy said. "Often, it's a single key frame that anchors a sequence, as is the case here with the Kelpie sequence I illustrated. Storyboards offer insight into the player's experience as our no-cut camera transitions between fluid combat, interactive gameplay moments, and narrative sequences."

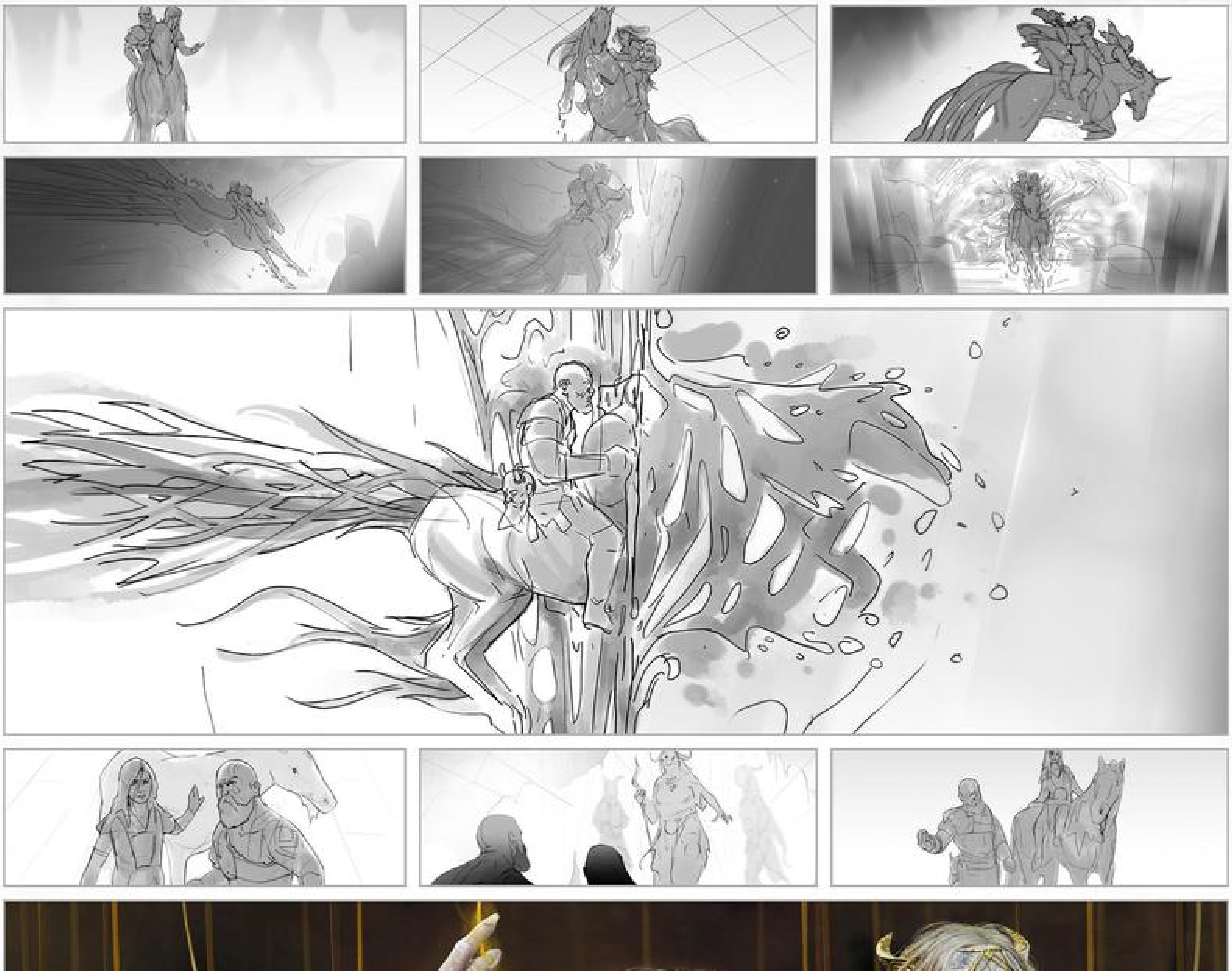






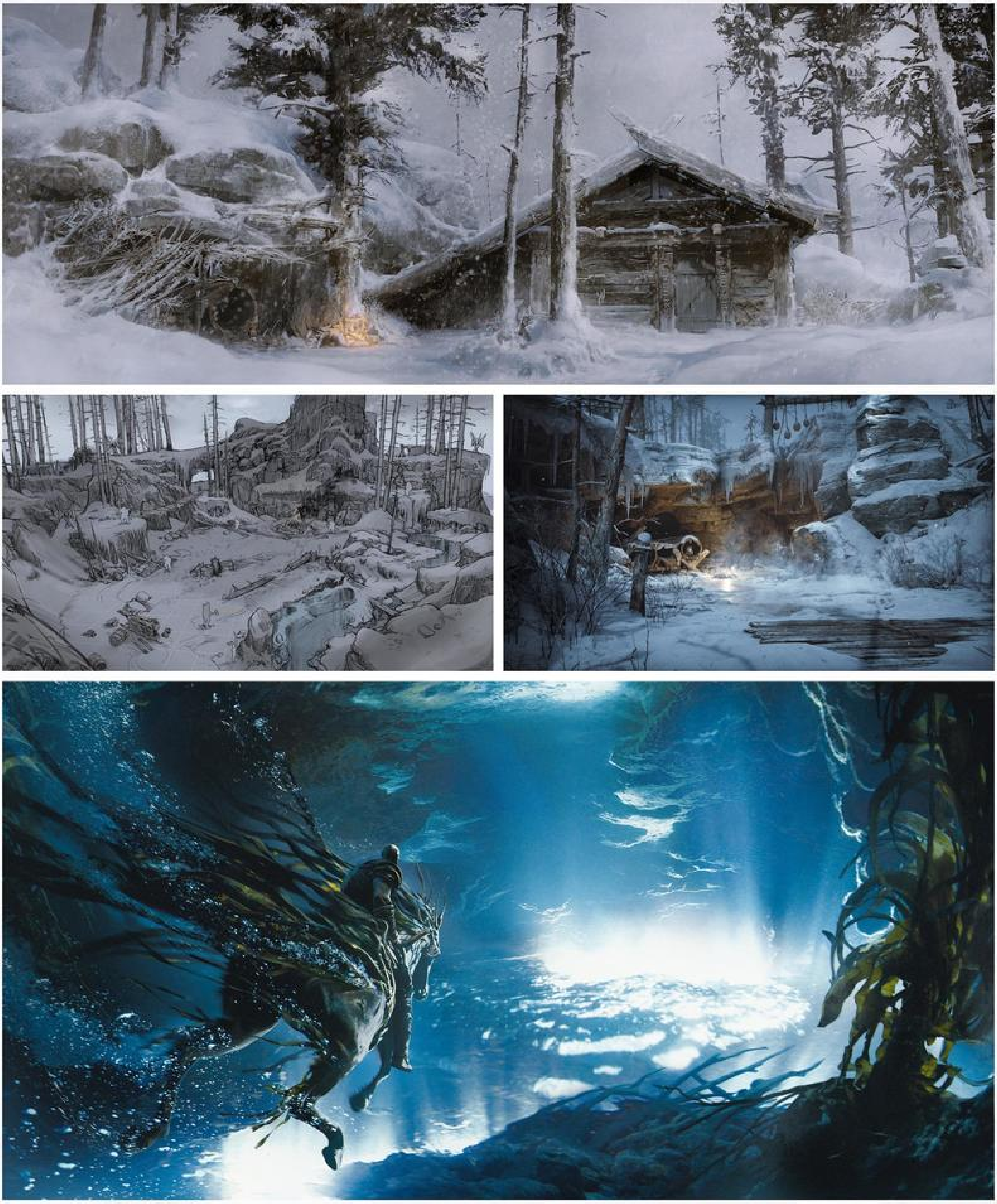


Kelpie movement storyboards. Artists: Shan Qiao (top); Joseph Kennedy (bottom)



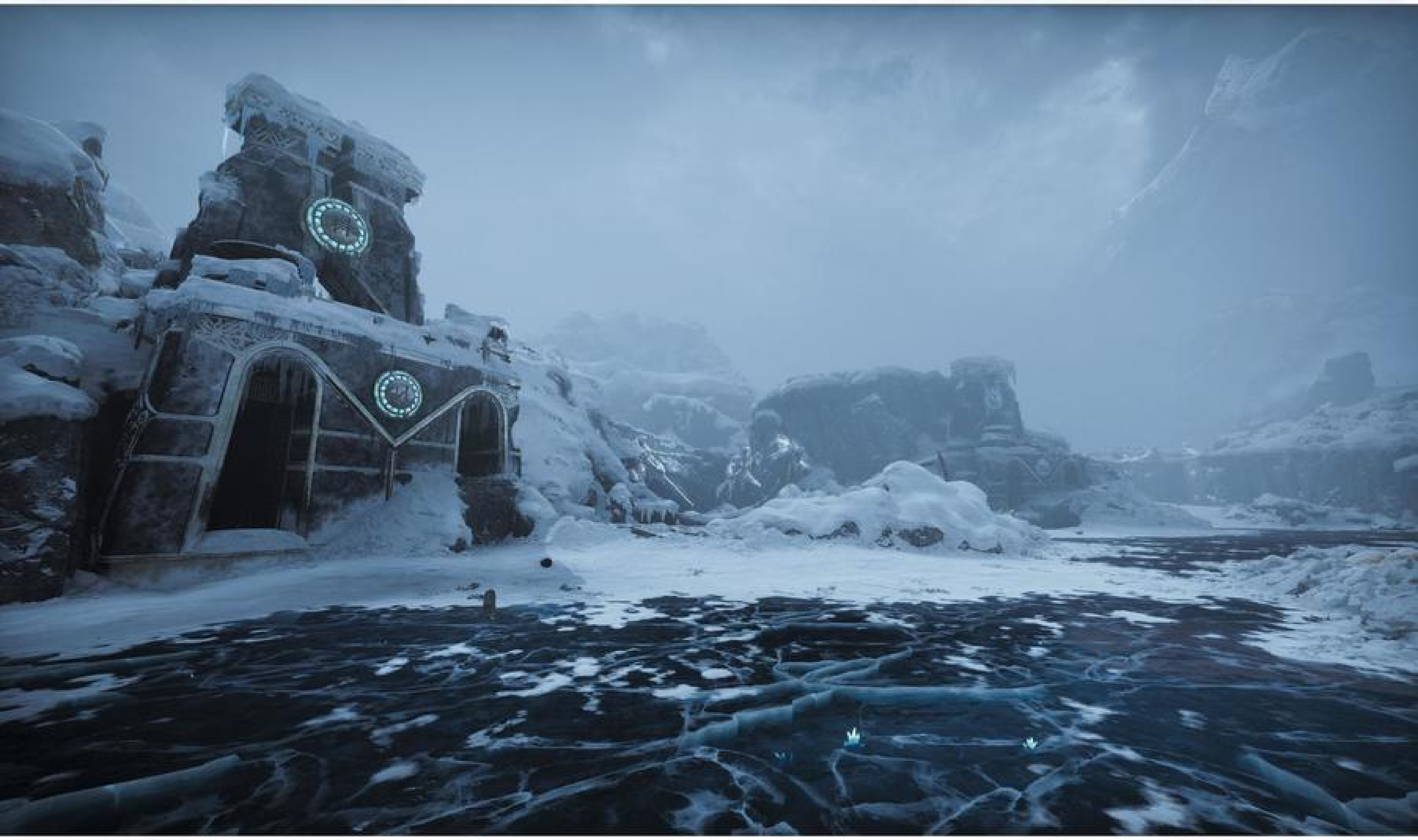
The Nornir. Artists: Joseph Kennedy (top); Rafael Grassetti (bottom)

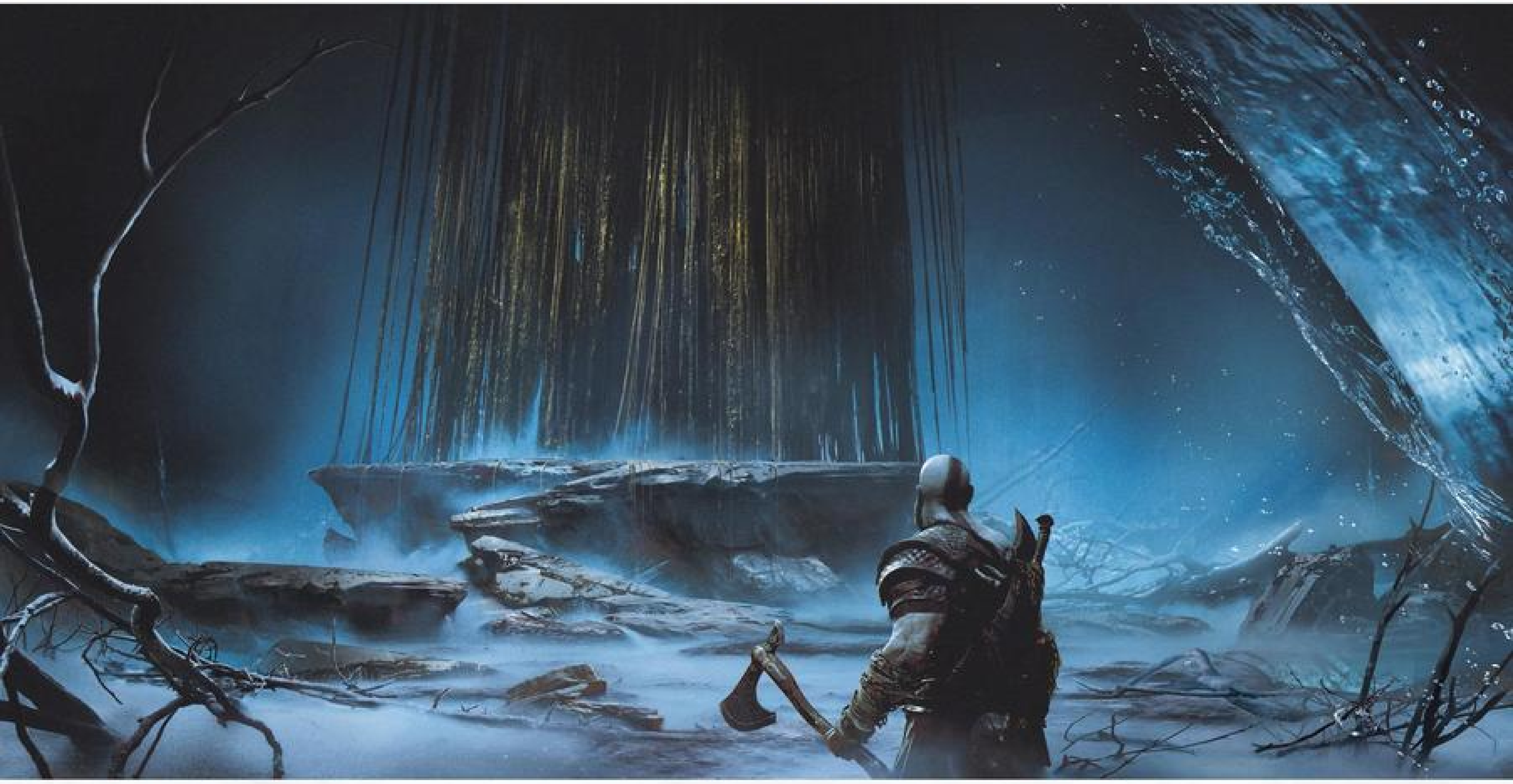
Snowy scenes in Midgard. Artists: Ryan Hong (top); Matteo Marjoram (middle left); Kyle Bromley, Mario Wiechec (middle right); Abe Taraky (bottom)



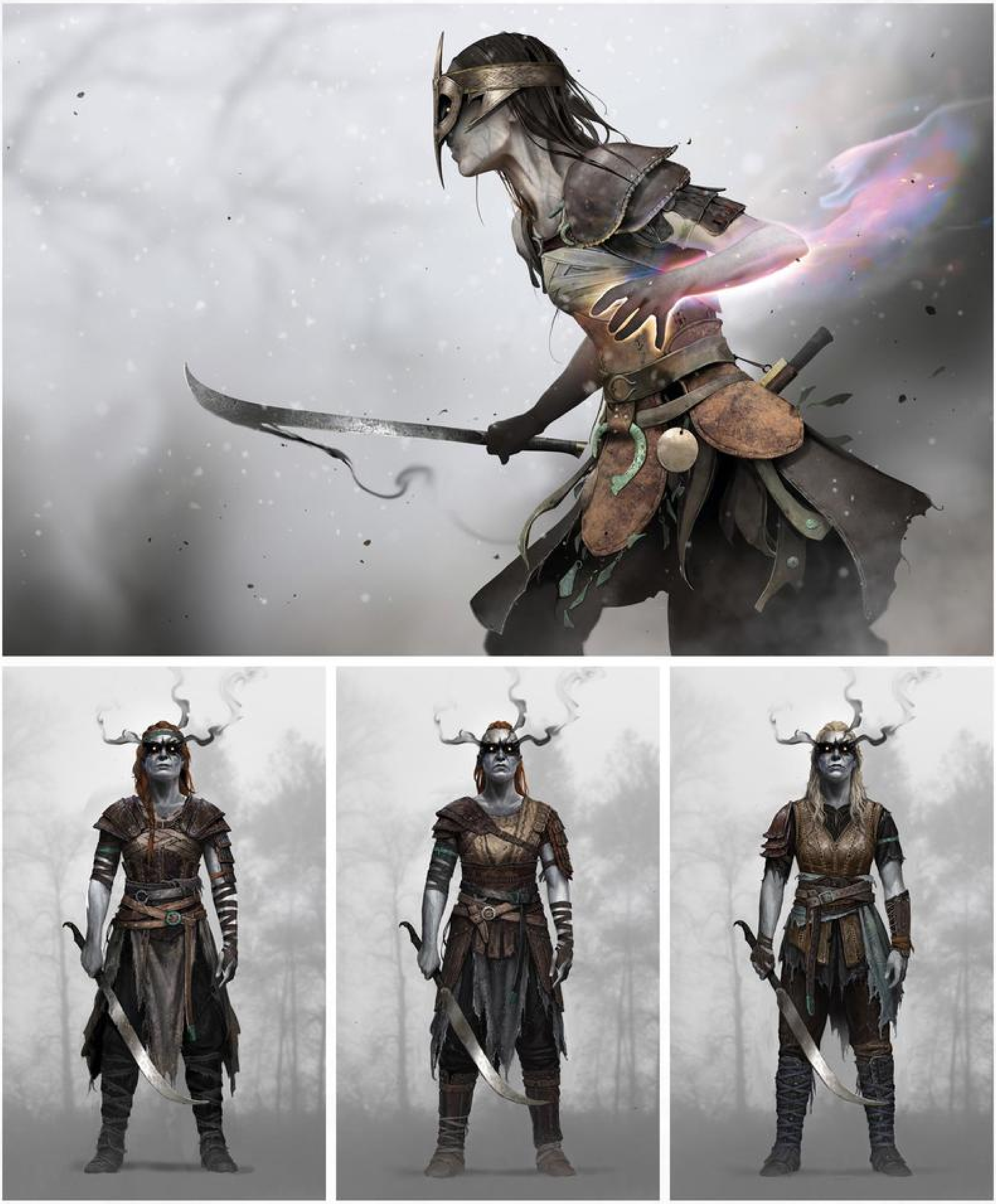
"I knew early on that I wanted to break every branch on the Scots pine trees that were within reach of Kratos' axe," artist Kyle Bromley said. "We ran into several issues in regard to performance on PlayStation 4 console, but after a lot of planning between our breakables artist Ruben Morales and me (plus a bit of help from code), we were able to keep them in the game."

Puzzle explorations. Artists: Burr Johnson, Mario Wiechec (top); Abe Taraky (bottom)



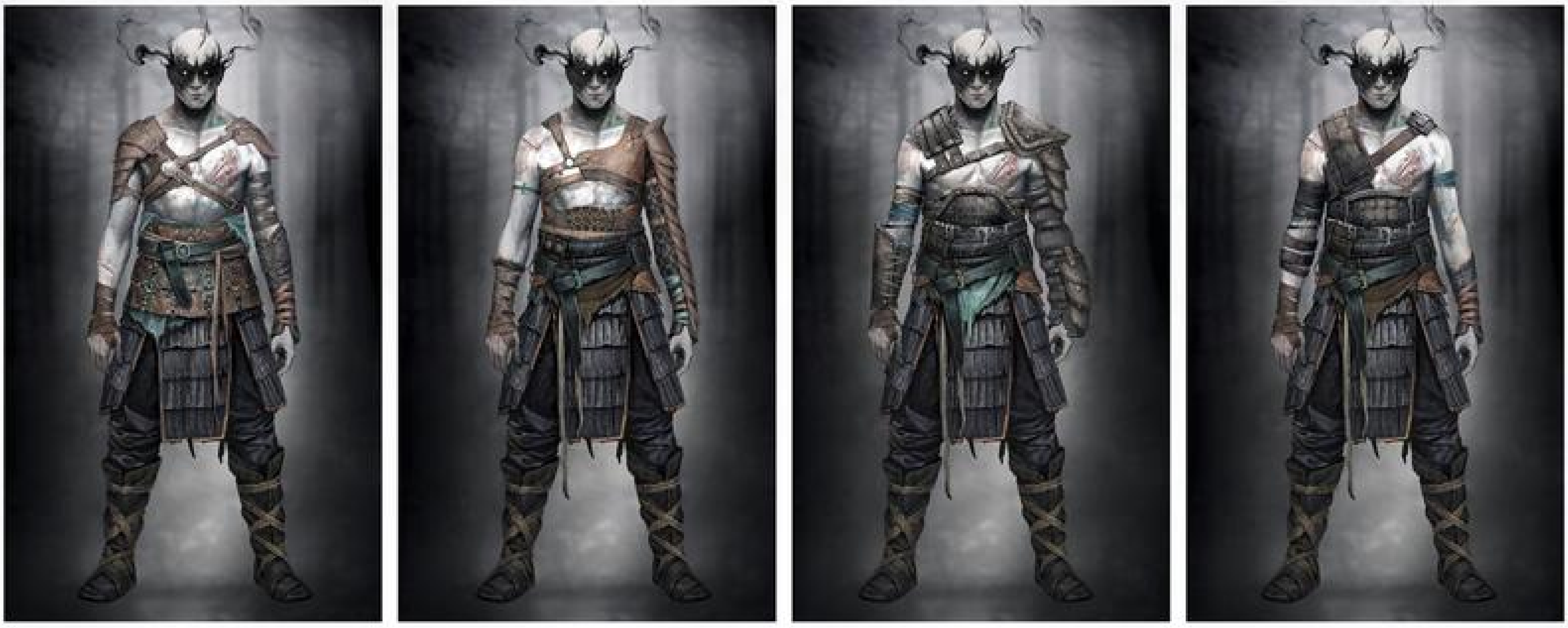


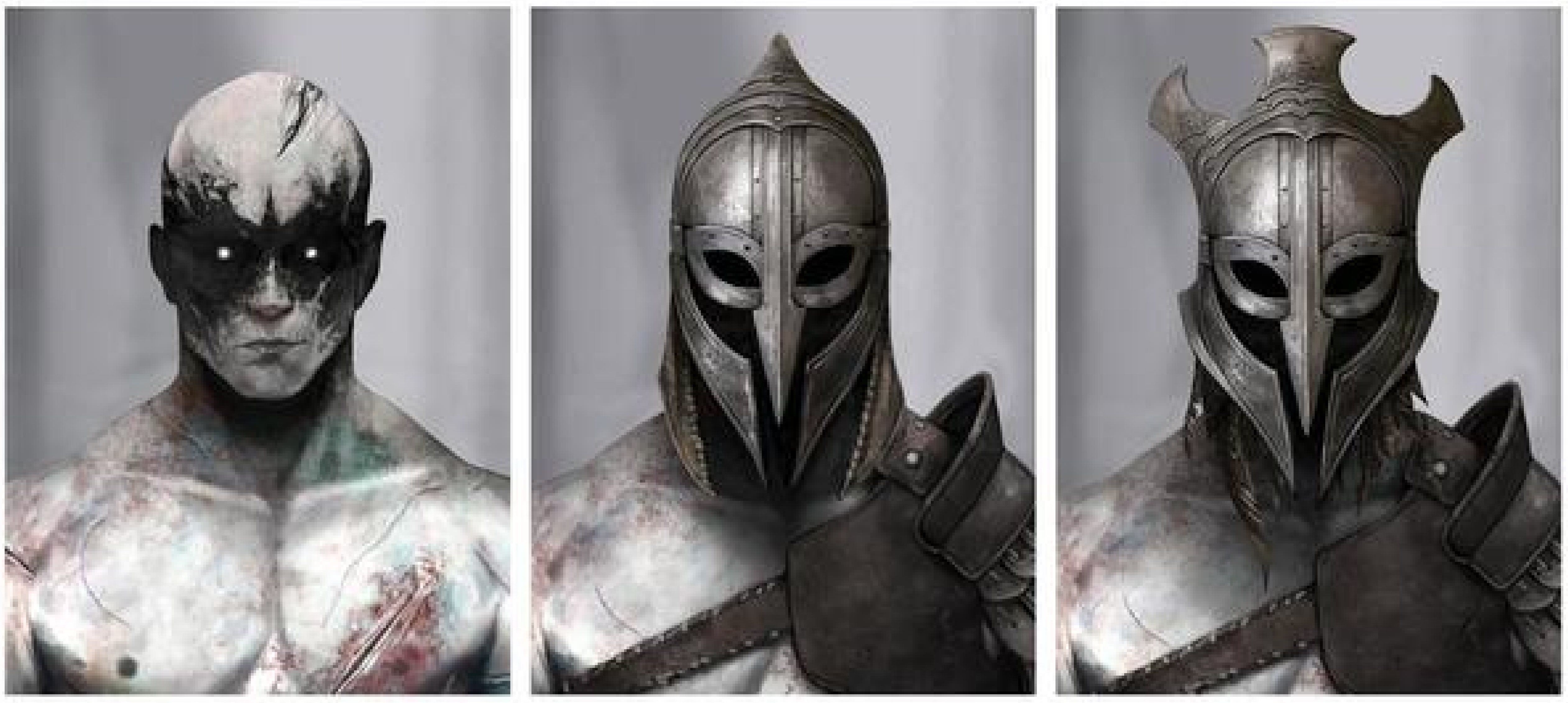
Exploring female Einherjar concepts. Artists: Dela Longfish (top); Shan Qiao (bottom)



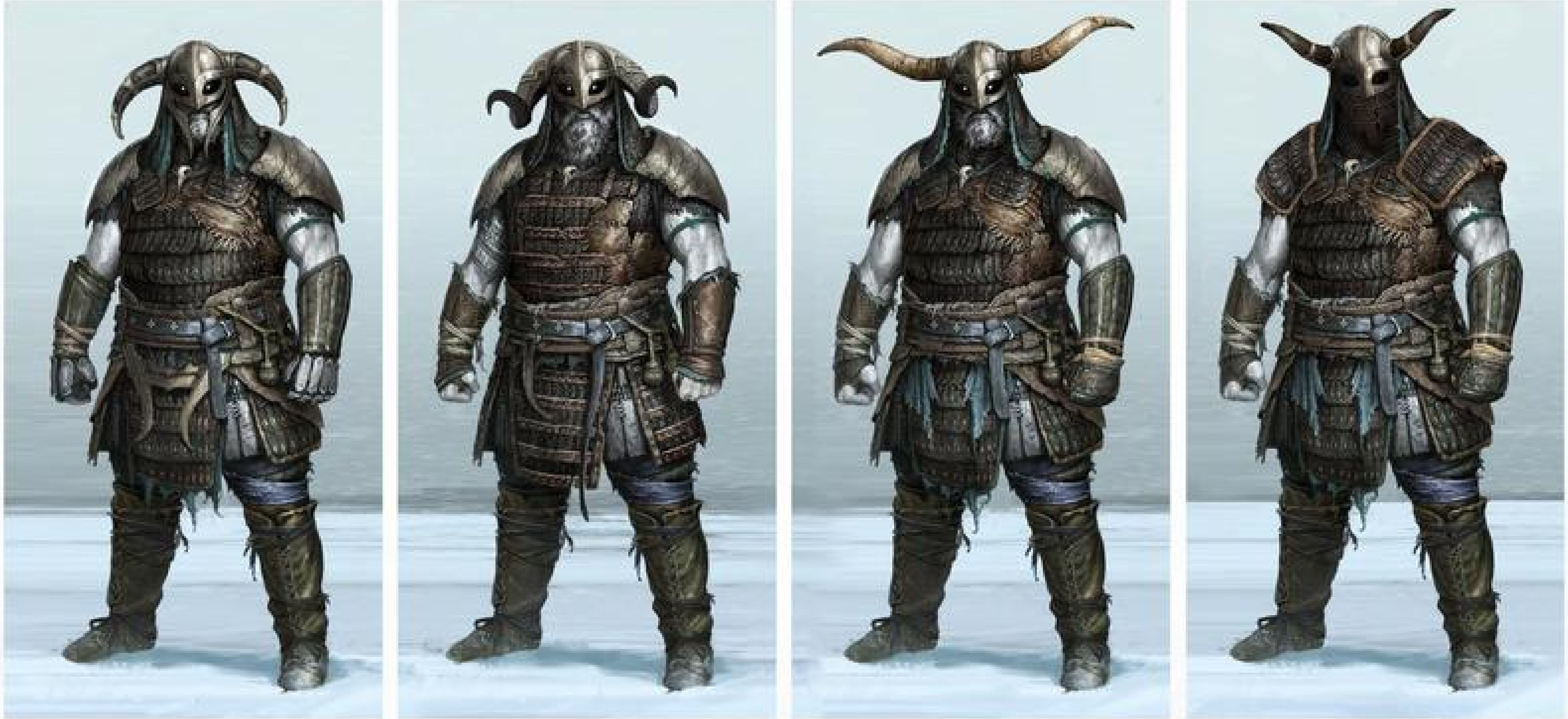
"In Norse mythology, the Einherjar are the bravest of the warriors who, after dying in battle, are handpicked by the Valkyries to serve in Odin's army," Longfish said. "We represented that aspect of the myth by using raven motifs as an inspiration across all their designs. You can see raven feathers and wing shapes present in their armor; even the stylized point of their helmets calls back to a raven's beak."

Artists: Anthony Sixto (top); Dela Longfish (middle); Shan Qiao (bottom)





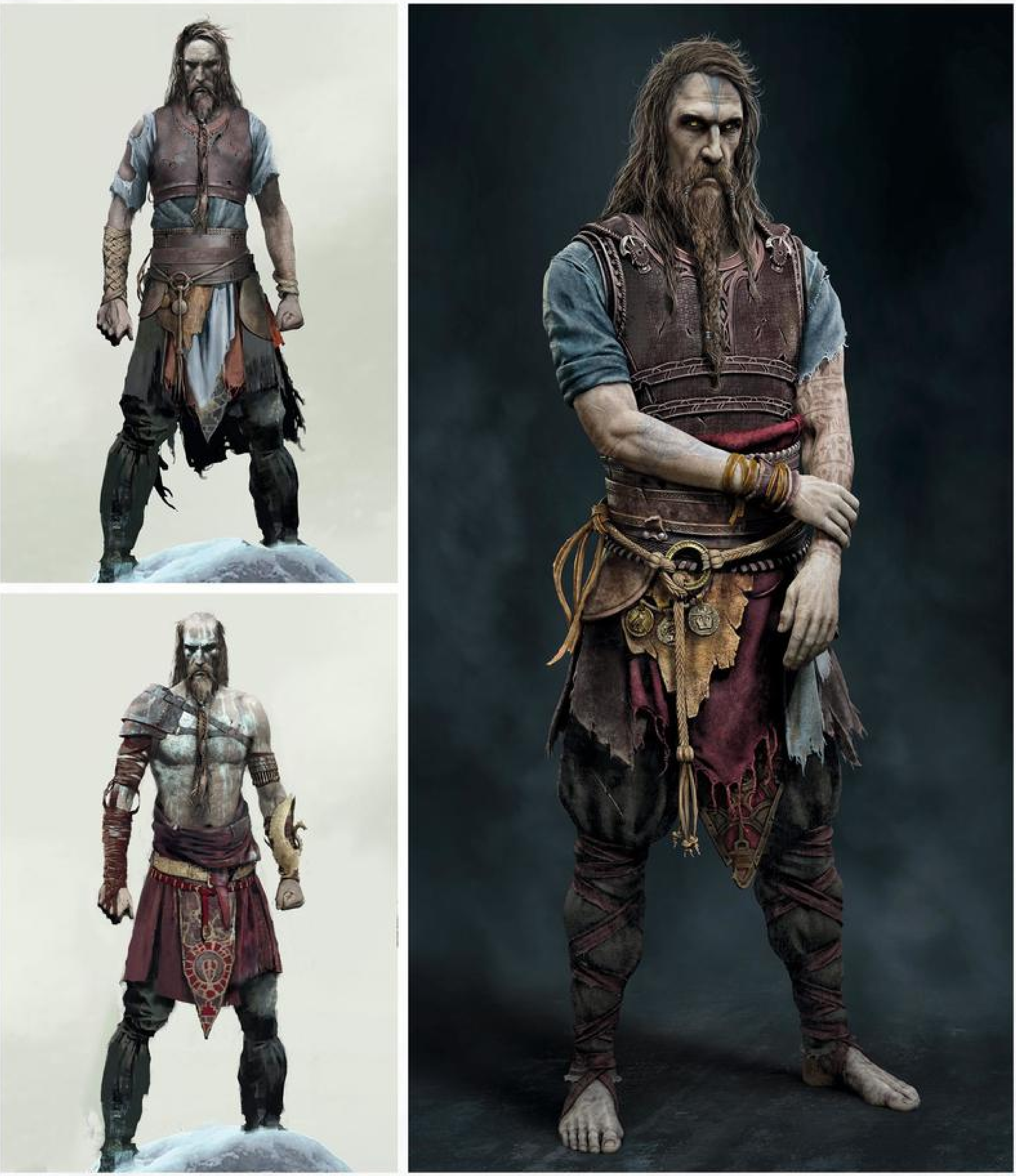
These illustrations explored the idea of Odin blessing each Einherjar by placing his hands on their heads. The artists imagined that touch from Odin left a dark handprint behind, one that would then burn into the warrior's skin. "The shape the handprint took resembled a raven and became a marking all the Einherjar wore," Longfish explained.



As Odin's faithful army, the Einherjar take orders without any hesitation and kill whoever Odin aims them at. For the heavy class of Einherjar, the artists wanted to push their size and craft an imposing and deadly look. Qiao noted, "The overall direction for this character class is very linear and straightforward, but that simplified direction helped them become more iconic and recognizable in the game."

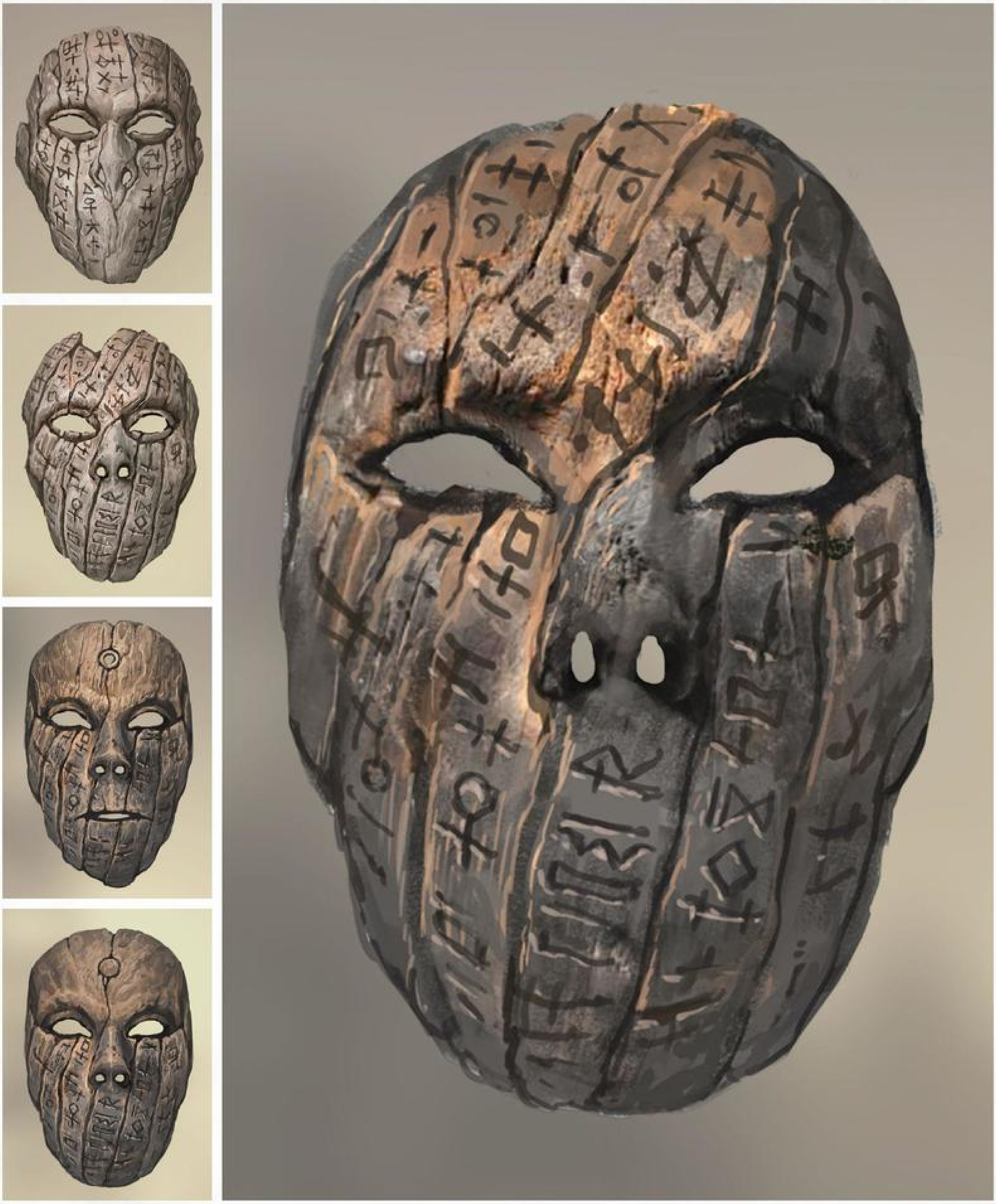
TÝR

The team had been thinking about the Norse god of war, Týr, since the previous game, in which he was frequently referenced. They knew he needed to be the opposite of Kratos and still look like someone people would trust in a time of war. Cabrera said, "Týr has been broken for a long time, and the markings of his knowledge of different cultures and his travels are something reflected in his design."



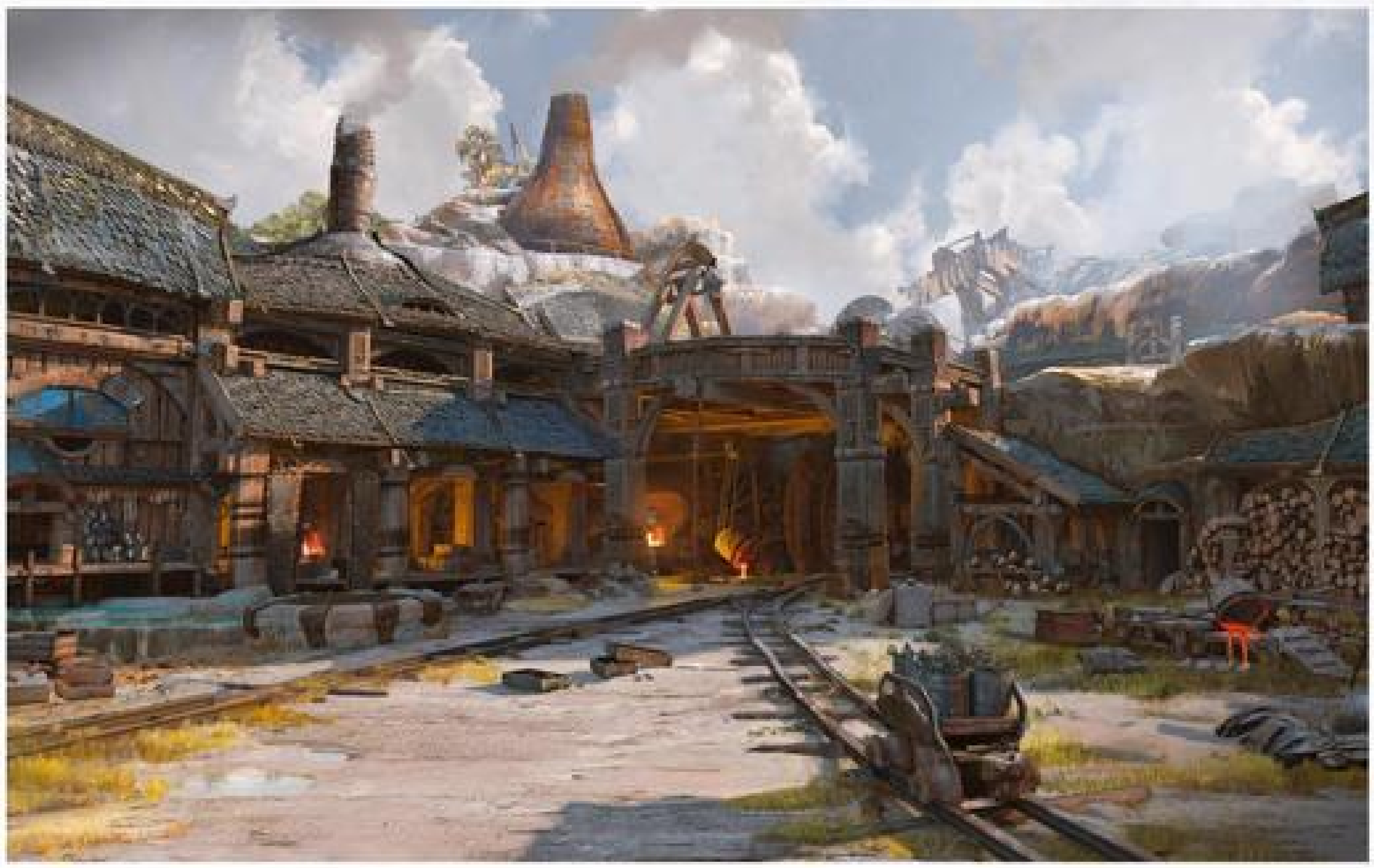
Týr costume concepts. Artists: José Cabrera (left); Rafael Grassetti (right)

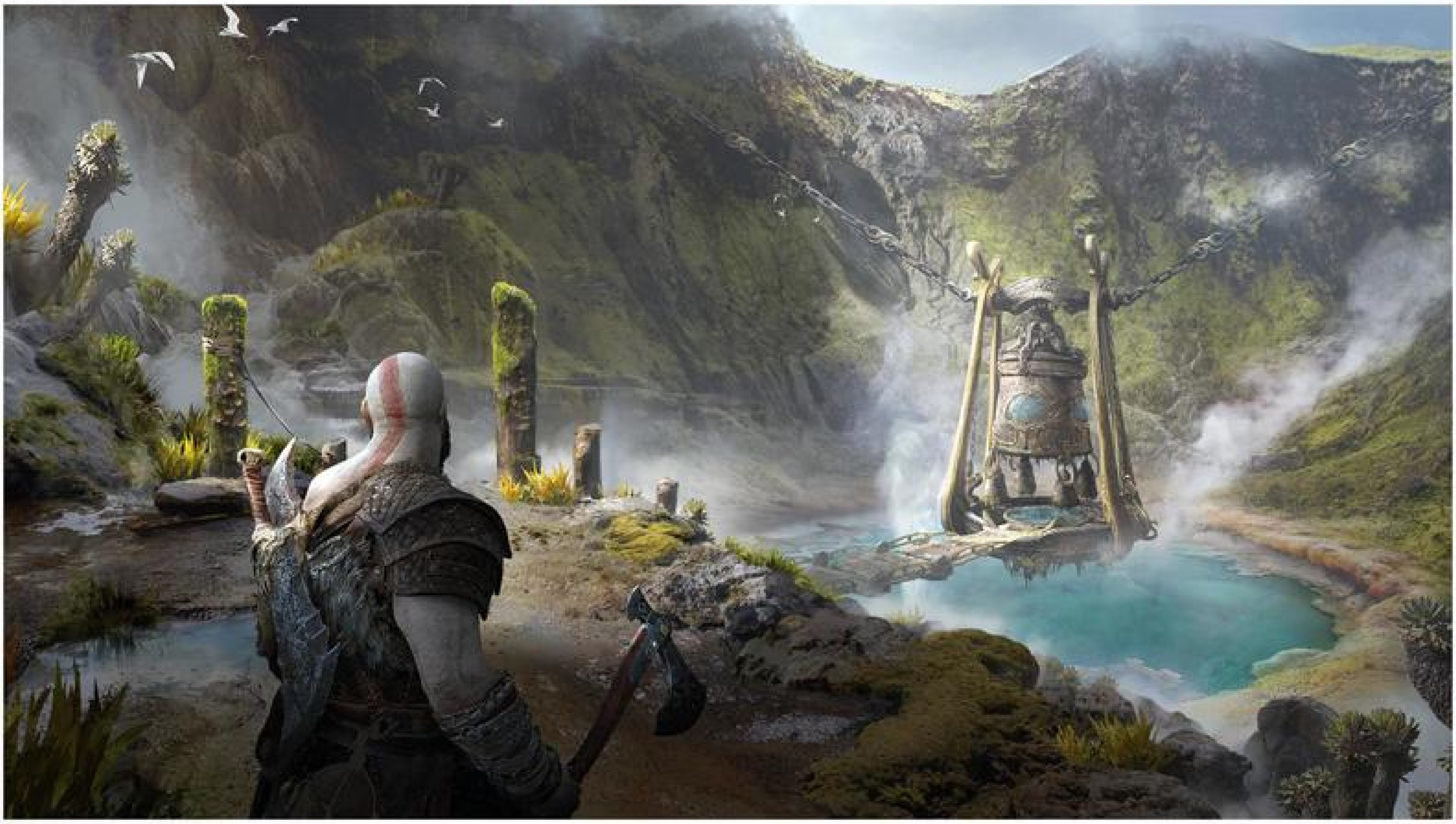
Mask relic concepts. Artist: Shan Qiao

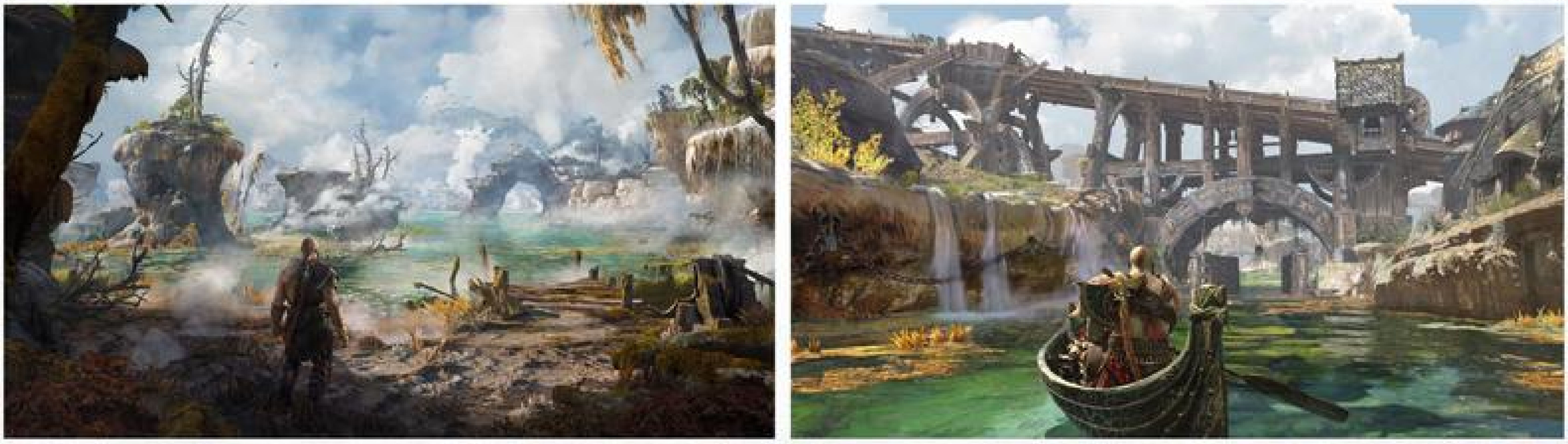


As Týr traveled between the realms, he sought peace and tried to broker goodwill whenever possible. He befriended many, and different cultures often gifted him with relics. This art explores a mysterious textured mask covered in various symbols and runes. Longfish hinted, “Wisdom comes in many different forms. Sometimes it is obvious; other times it’s concealed behind a mystery.”

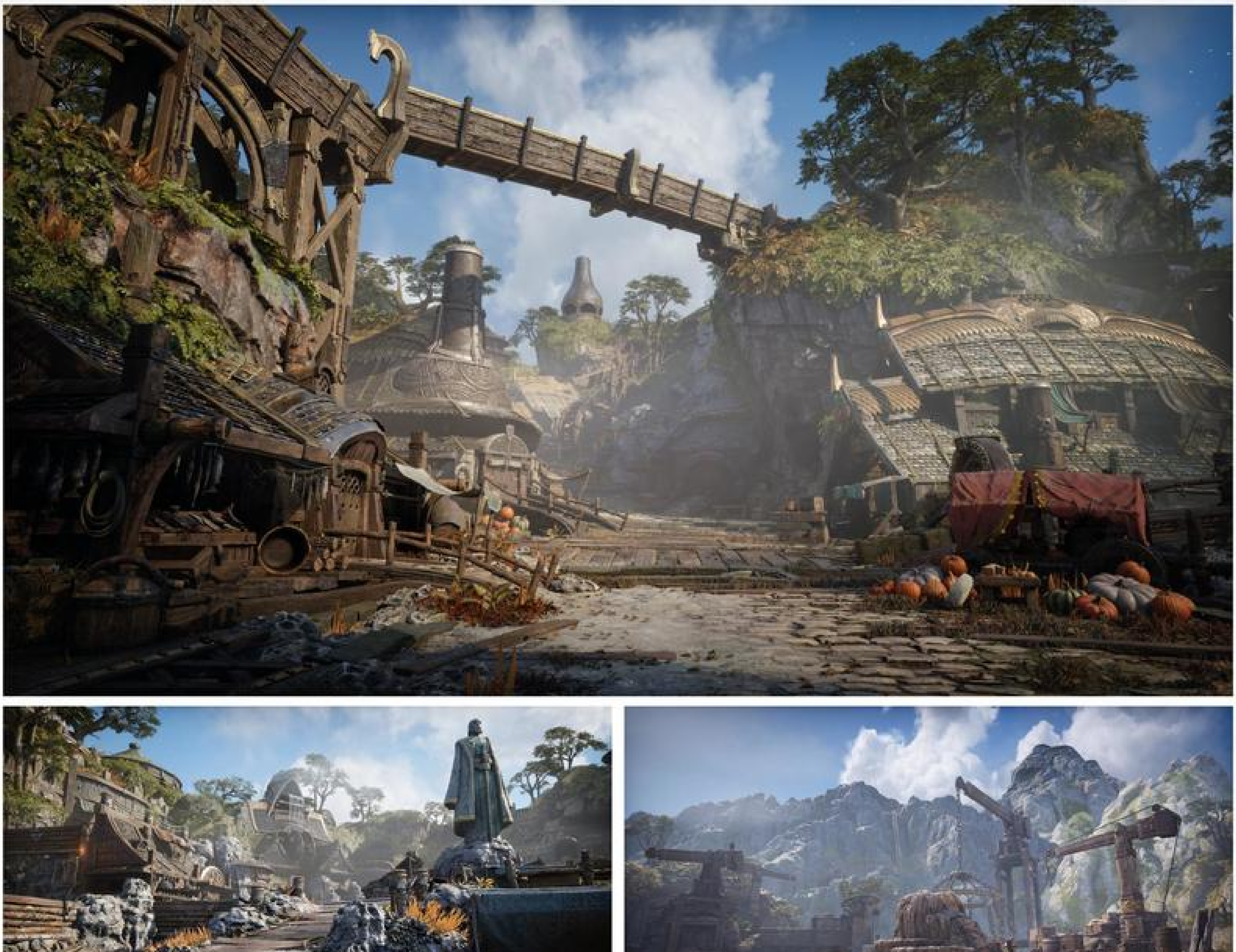
Nidavellir became a very rewarding area for the artists to work on. The size and profile of the Dwarven architecture across the biome was key in establishing the realm's identity. Artist Dannie Carlone said, "It was fulfilling to make a narratively rich space while collaborating with the level designer, James Riding, to create fun exploration. Nidavellir was a huge undertaking with many amazing artists bringing it to life: Ivanna Liittschwager, Nick Comeau, Raul Aparicio, Giovani Magana, Erik Jakobsen, and more."





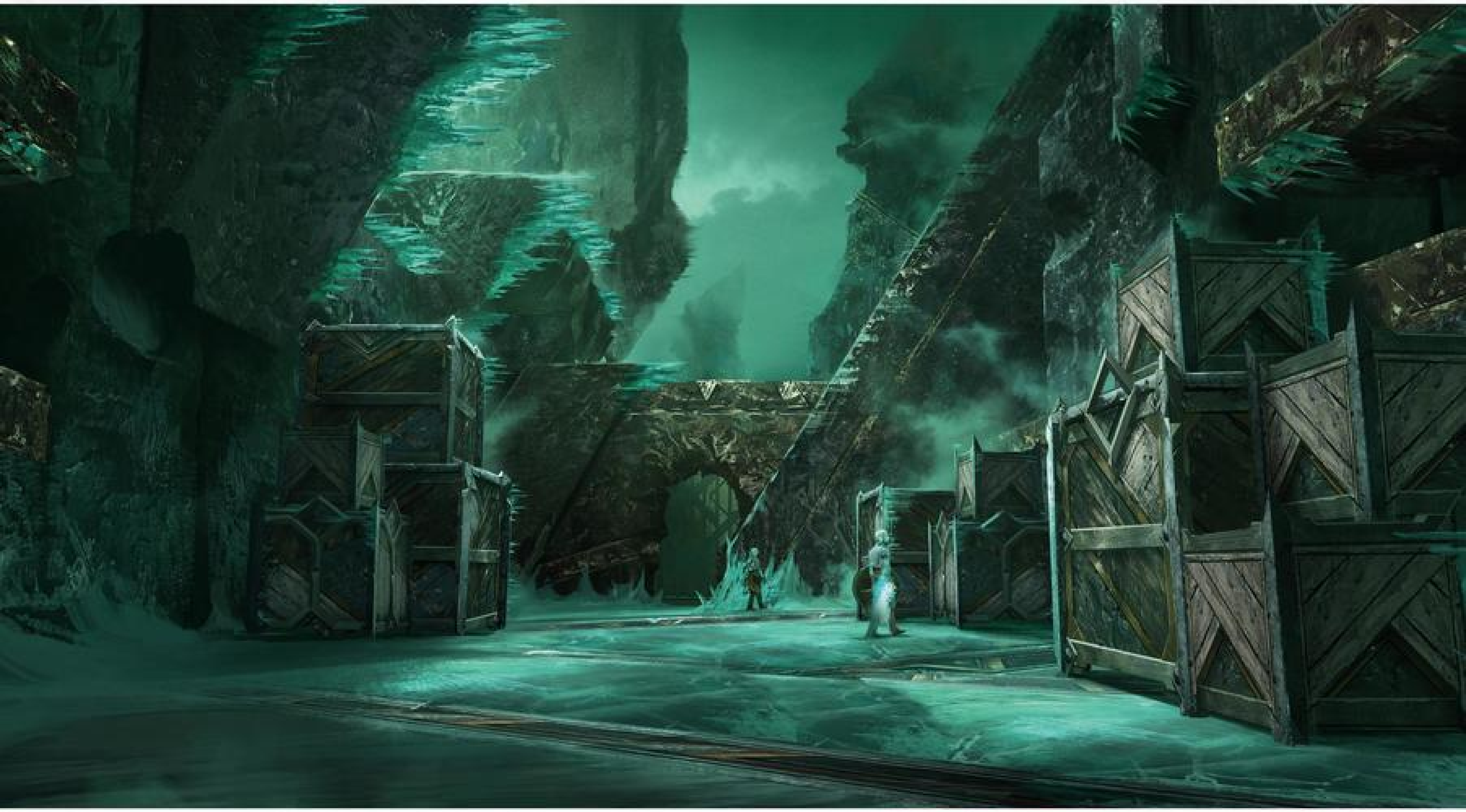


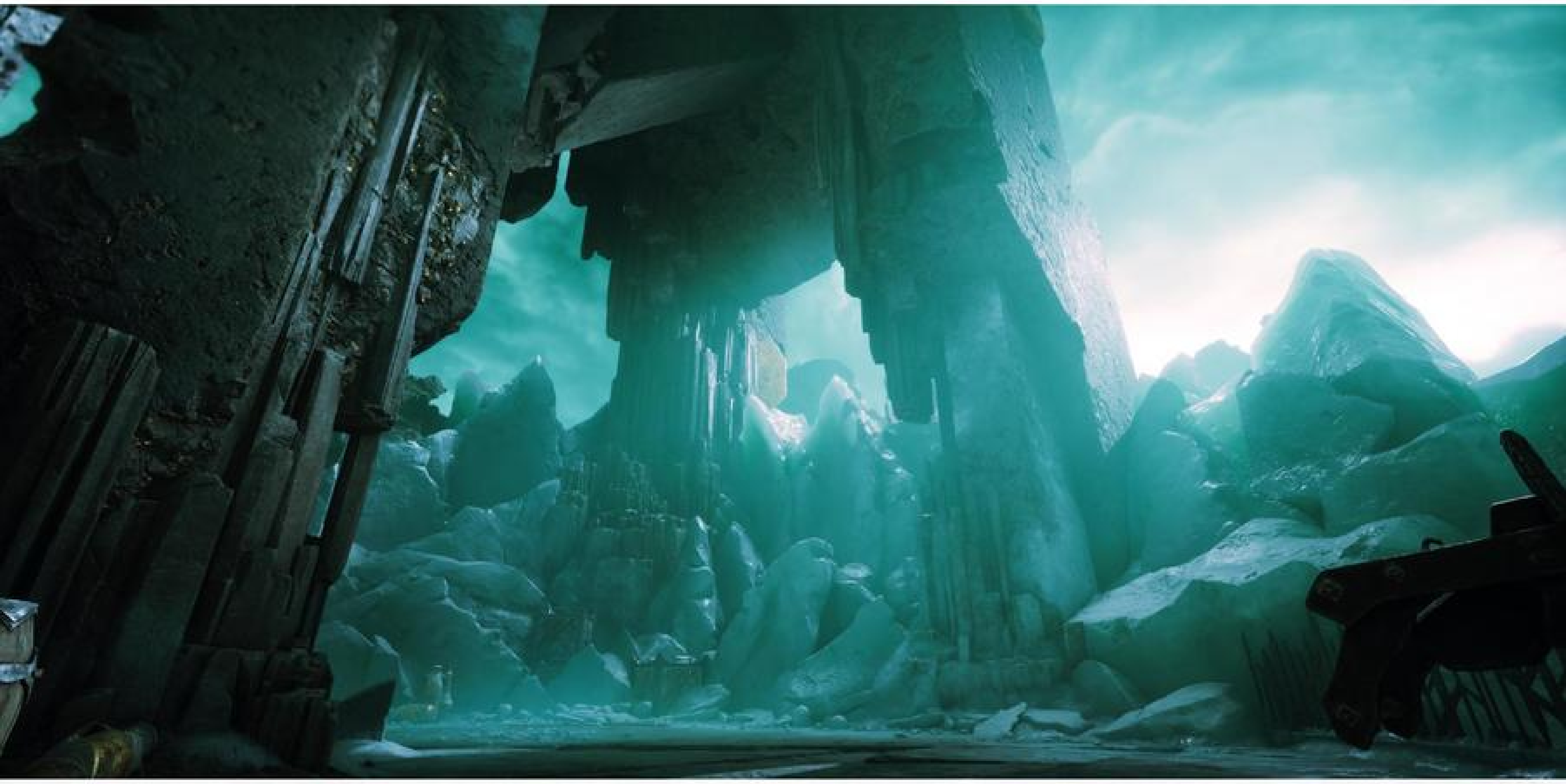
Svartalfheim's geothermal functionality explorations. Artists: KARAKTER Design Studio (top and bottom); Norris Lin (middle)



The settled areas of Svartalfheim. Artists: Dannie Carlone, Ivanna Liittschwager, Raul Aparicio, Brandon Cha (top and middle left); Paul Coda, Brandon Cha (middle right); Matthieu Mouthon, Gary Buchanan, Sady Fofana, Brandon Cha (bottom)

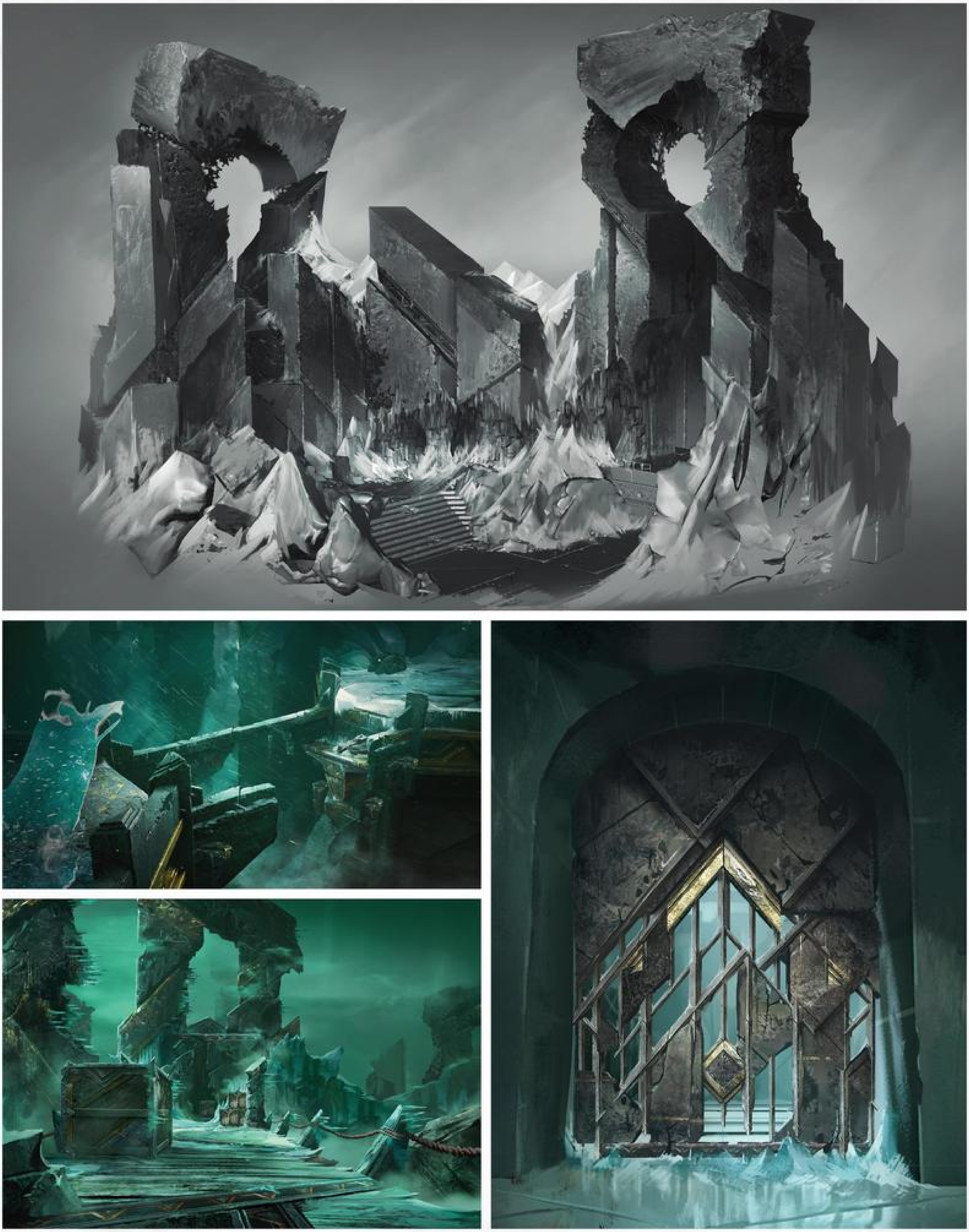
Helheim ice concepts. Artists: Norris Lin (top); Alexis Boyer, Sandra Zwetzig, Michael Kahn-Rose (bottom)



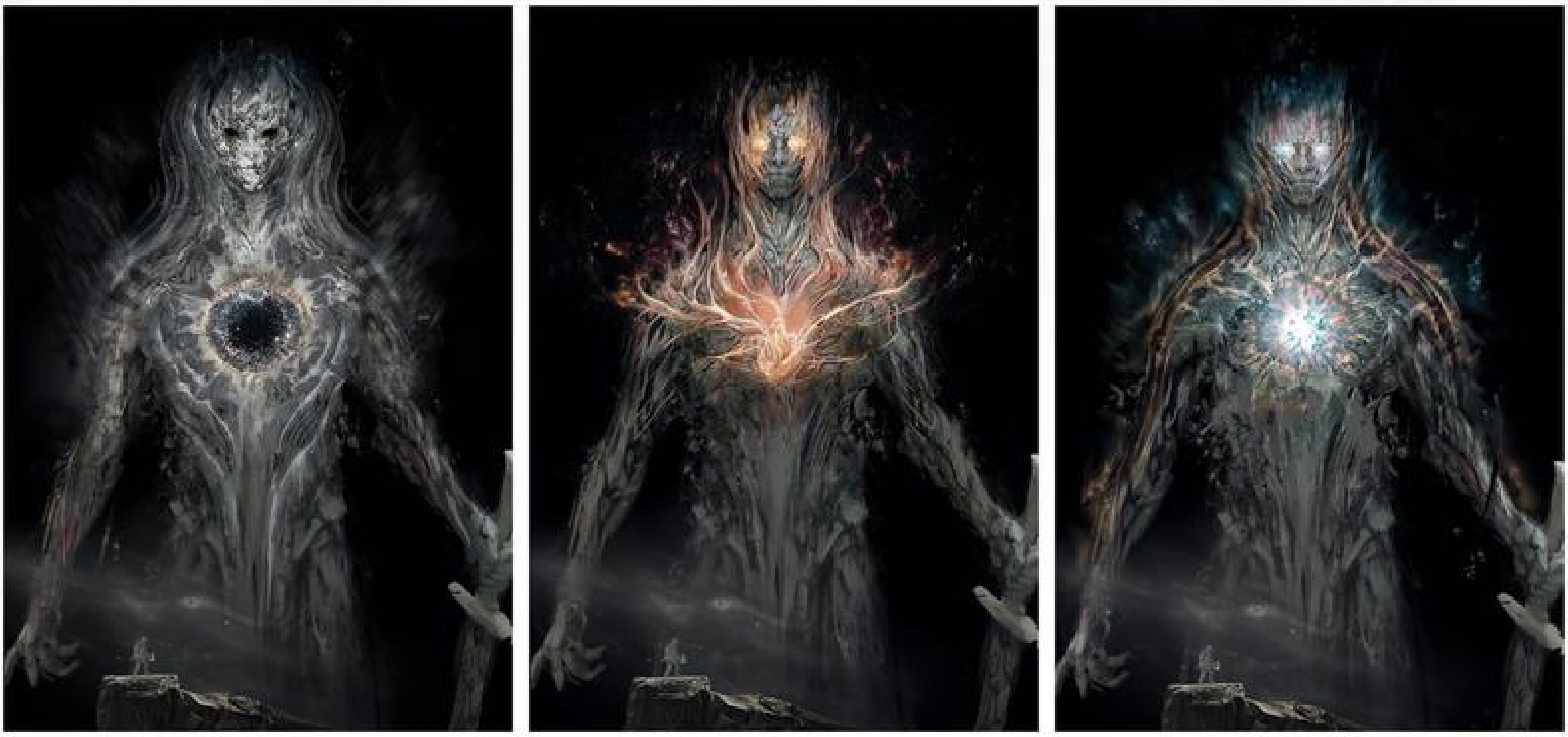


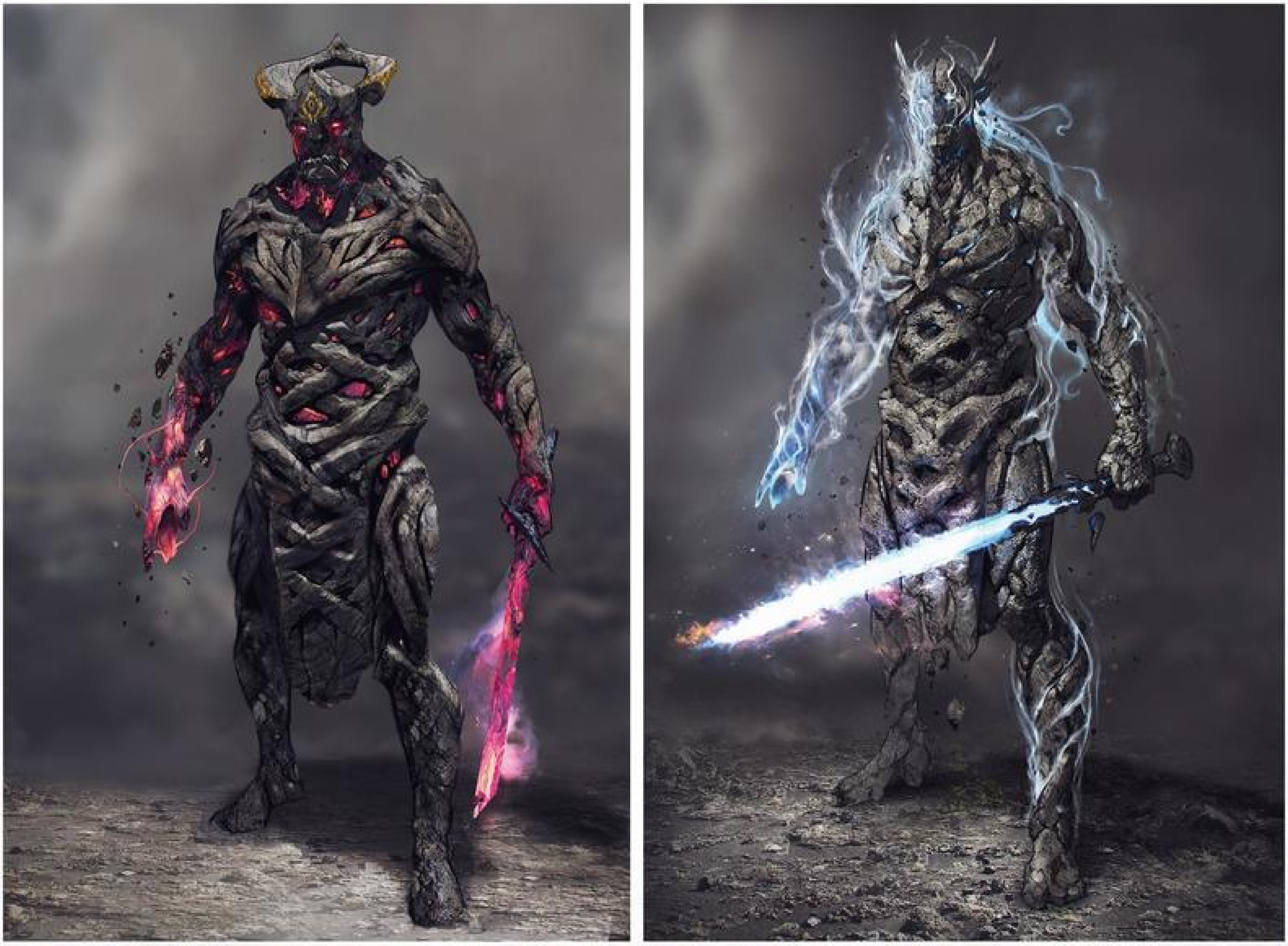
The realm of the dead, Helheim hosts those who die a dishonorable death. Dark clouds hang in the sky, while an ominous green hue permeates every space, making the realm feel permanently timeless. Fimbulwinter in Helheim comes with windswept, angular icicles and pointed formations that are intentionally different from the more swooping shapes in Niflheim.

Structures in Helheim. Artists: Adam Rehmann (top, middle left, and bottom right); Norris Lin (bottom left)



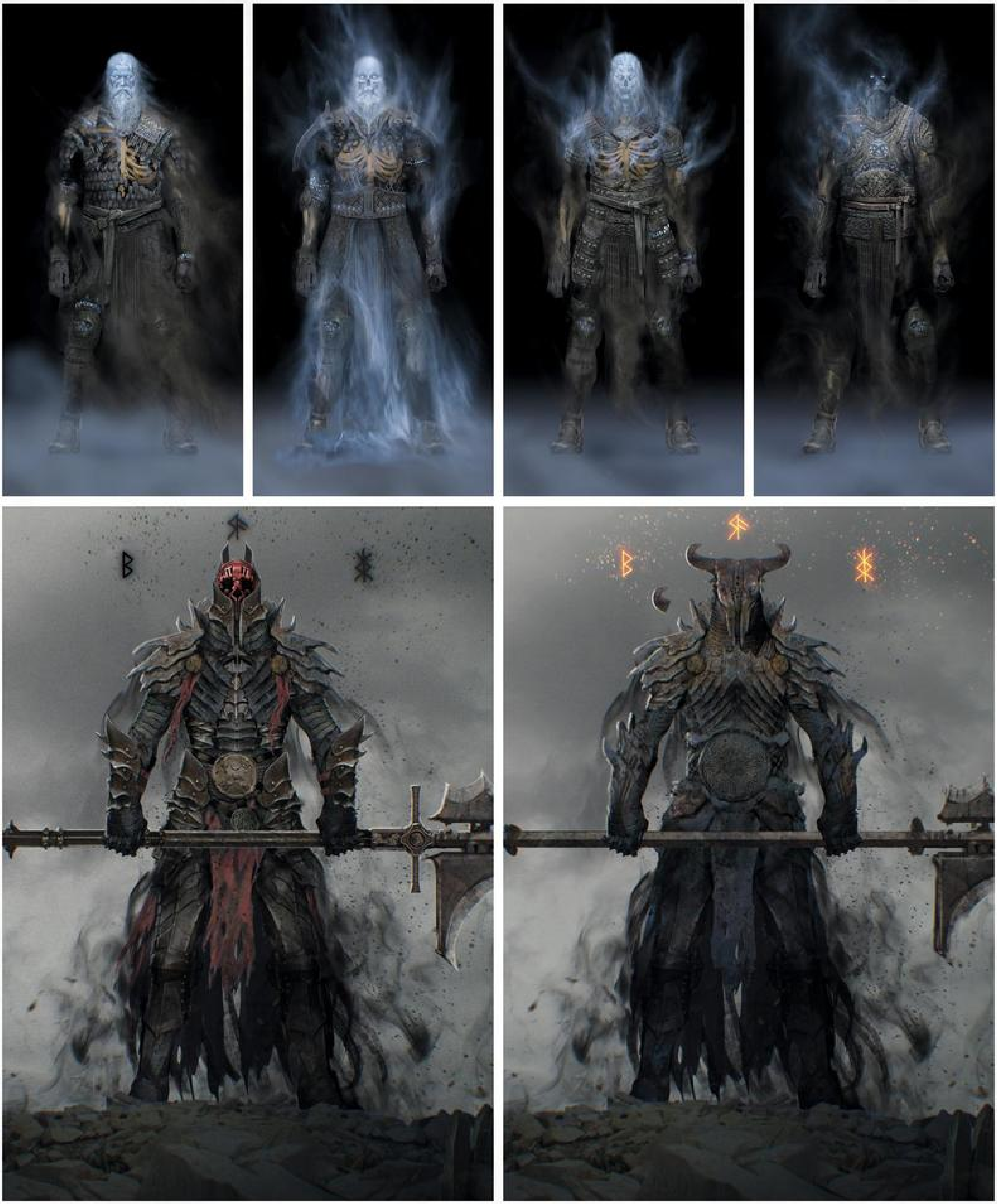
Concepts exploring a more androgynous body type for Ragnarök. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Anthony Sixto (bottom); José Cabrera (opposite)





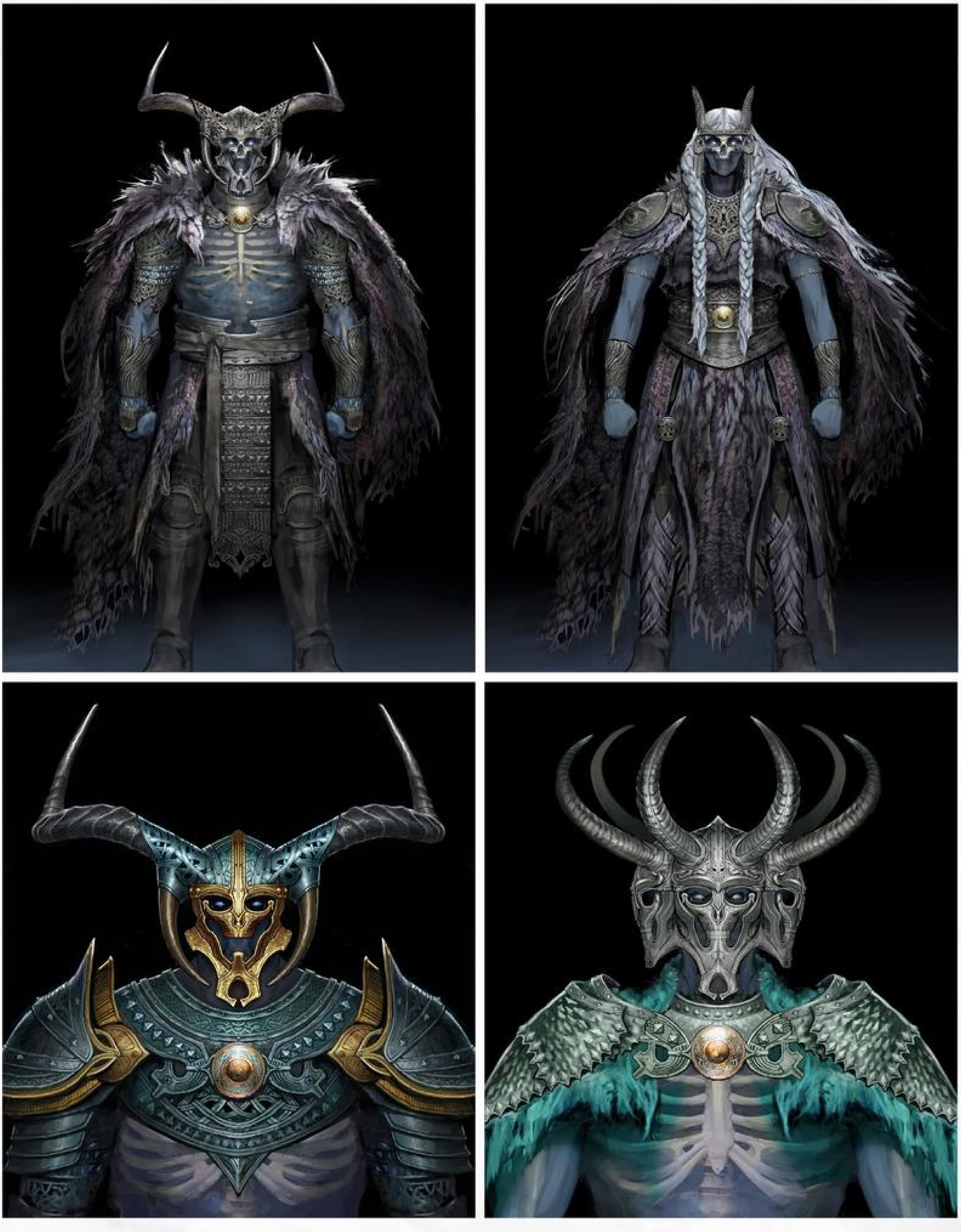
The direction the artists received for the game's final and titular character, Ragnarök, was to design a force of nature. They leaned toward an elemental effect in the early stages of design, considering hurricanes and snowstorms. Then, Kligerman said, "We wanted to explore some ideas with more of a structural form and relatable body type. At that point we looked at black holes, exploding stars, and other cosmic phenomena and integrated them within the rocky physical form of Ragnarök."

Fading Warrior Souls concepts. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top); Karl Lindberg (bottom)



Warrior Souls appear late in the game as challenging bosses. They had to be as intimidating and impressive as the Valkyries, but without the expansive wings. The artists found this to be a tough task. Kligerman said, "During the design process we found that elaborate large horns, big shoulders, and huge fur capes were good design elements to stick to. So along with those choices, we went with skull motifs because they themselves are resurrected skeleton warriors."

Finding a different silhouette for female Warrior Souls. Artists: Yefim Kligerman (top and bottom right); Shan Qiao (bottom left)



Ragnarök to come. *Artist: Vance Kovacs*

Artist: Abe Taraky

IV

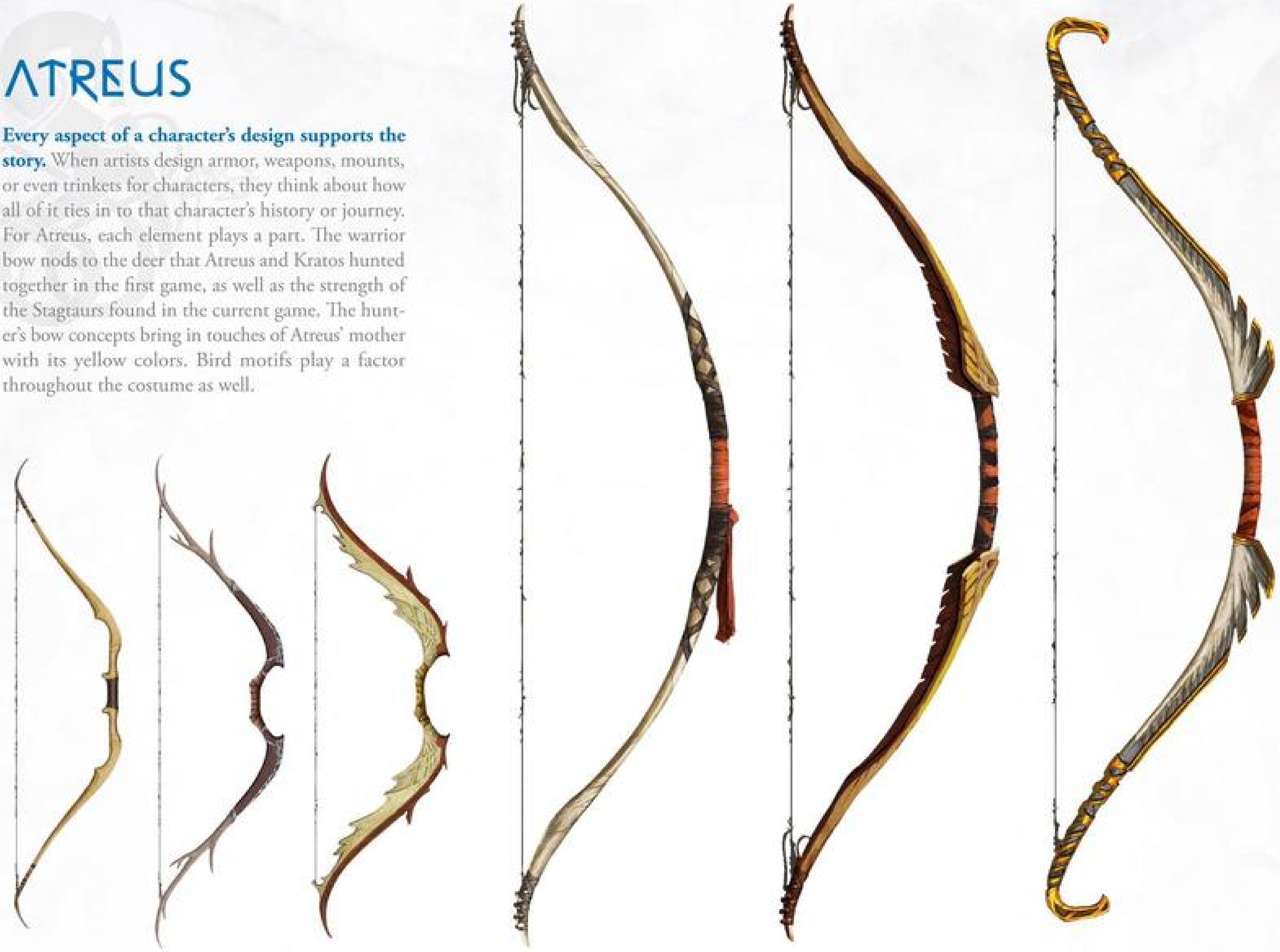
A JOURNEY'S END

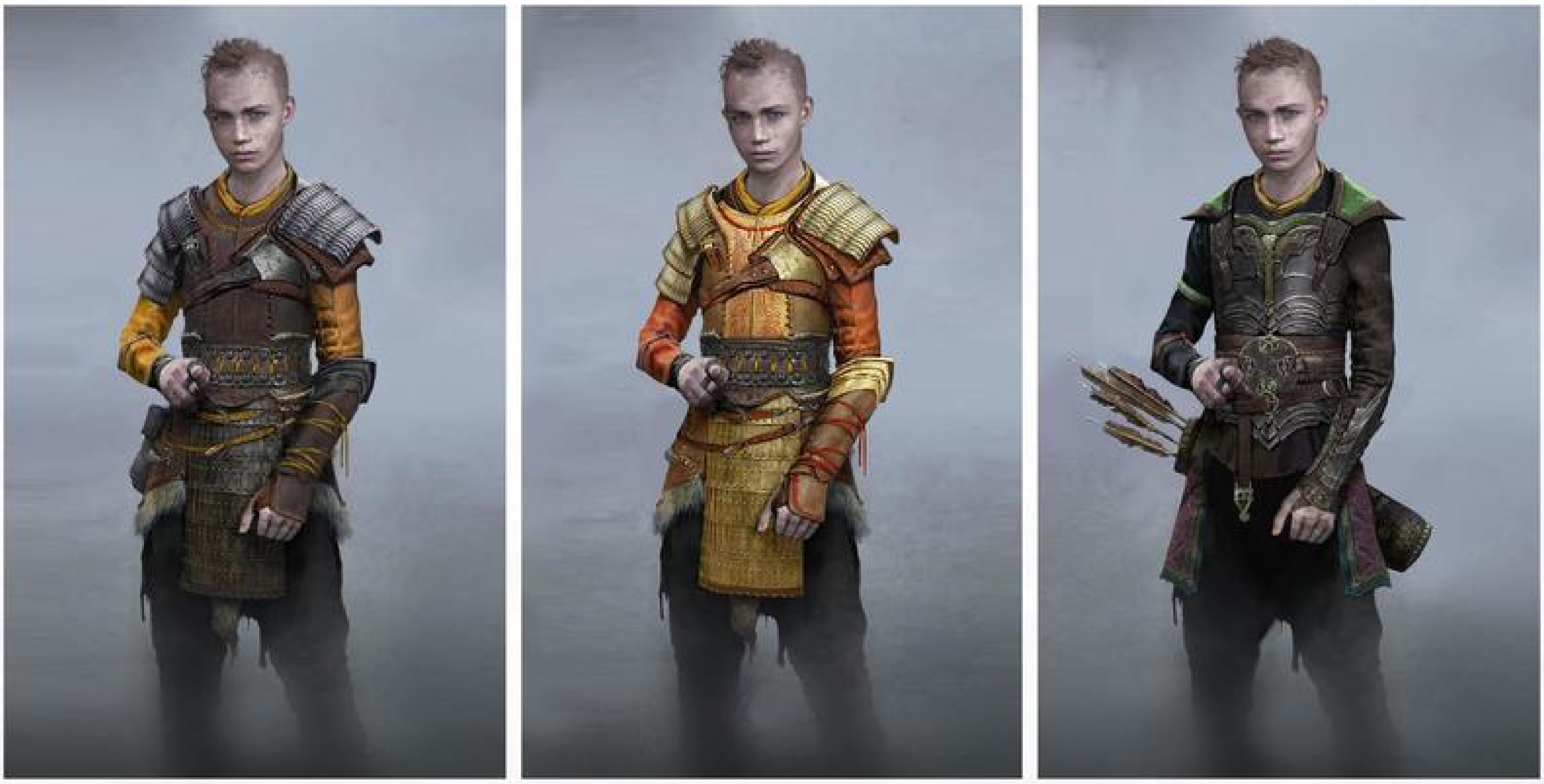
With production of *God of War Ragnarök* in its final stages, all departments turned their attention to the elusive place where design meets playability. Every single aspect of the game, down to each clump of grass, was hand placed by an artist. These experts focused on presenting those details in each model while also delivering extremely high fidelity.

This is when the game made the last leap from initial concepts to finished work. For the environments, it was important to manage the game's resources while consistently producing first-rate quality throughout the large spaces using atmosphere and careful lighting. For characters, the artists completed the journey they began in preproduction, when they designed basic gray mesh models to first achieve a feel for the characters in three dimensions. Here, they added the crucial finishing touches that bring vitality to each character, as they prepared to balance the finished models with lighting and color correction passes.

ATREUS

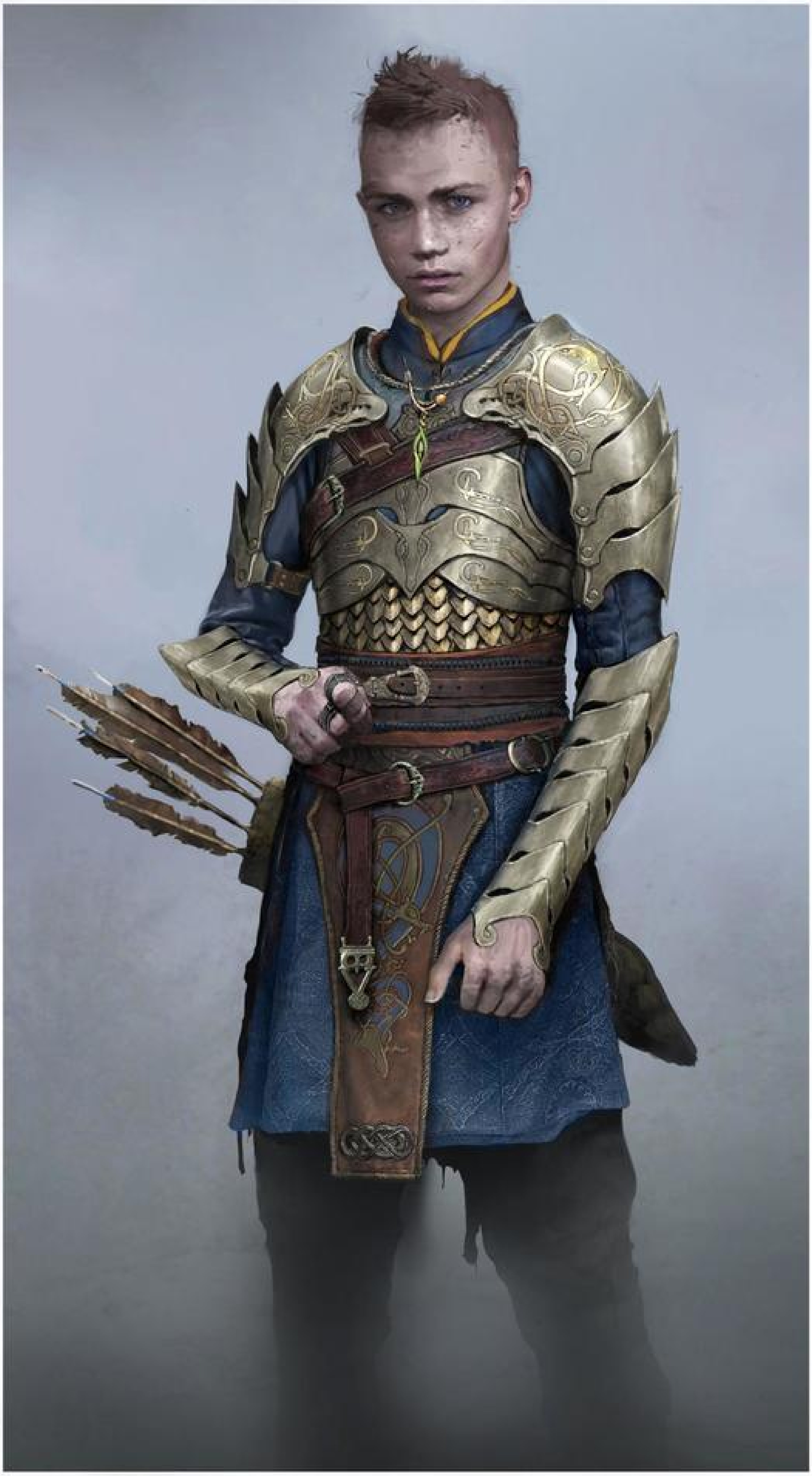
Every aspect of a character's design supports the story. When artists design armor, weapons, mounts, or even trinkets for characters, they think about how all of it ties in to that character's history or journey. For Atreus, each element plays a part. The warrior bow nods to the deer that Atreus and Kratos hunted together in the first game, as well as the strength of the Stagtaurs found in the current game. The hunter's bow concepts bring in touches of Atreus' mother with its yellow colors. Bird motifs play a factor throughout the costume as well.

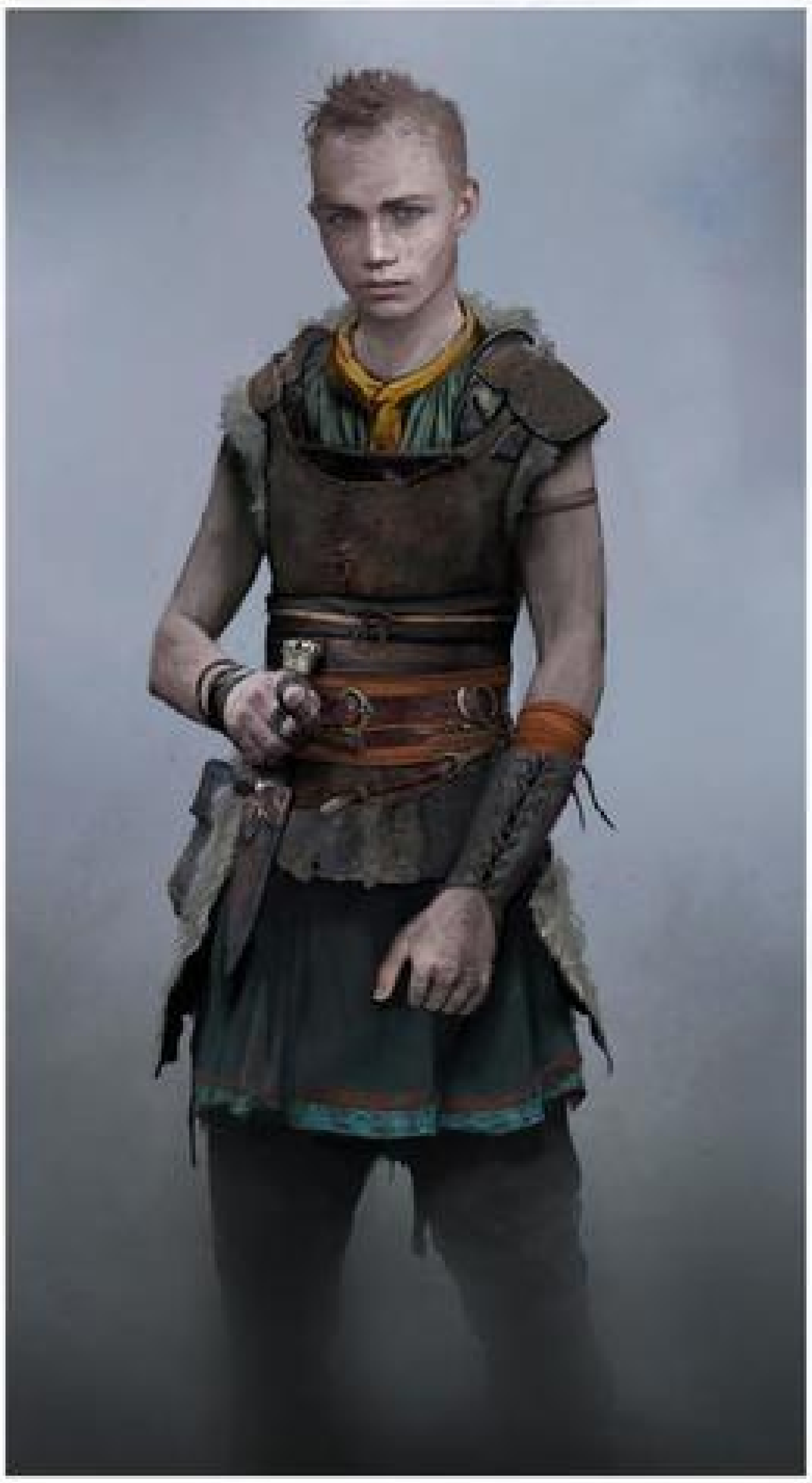


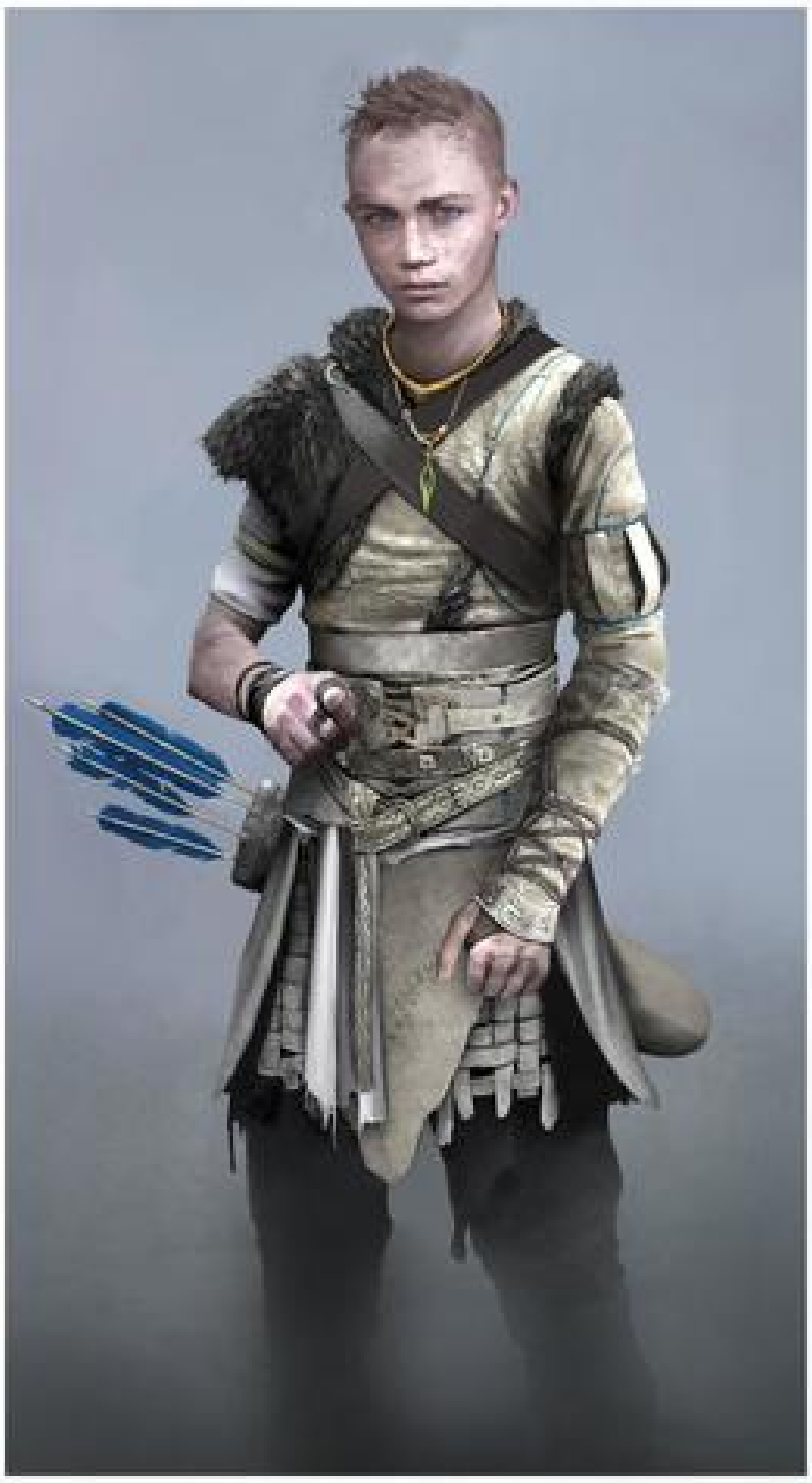


Color explorations for Atreus. Artists: Stephen Oakley (top); José Cabrera (bottom left and bottom right); José Cabrera and Shan Qiao (bottom center)

Armor concepts for Atreus. Artist: José Cabrera





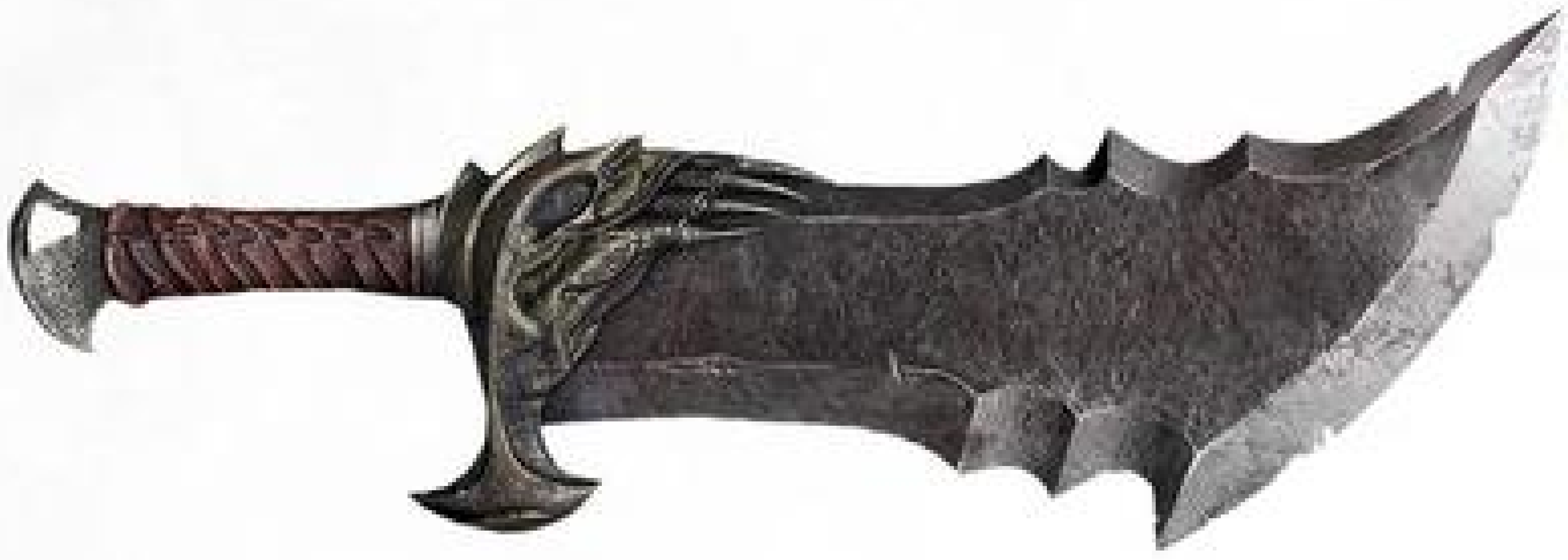


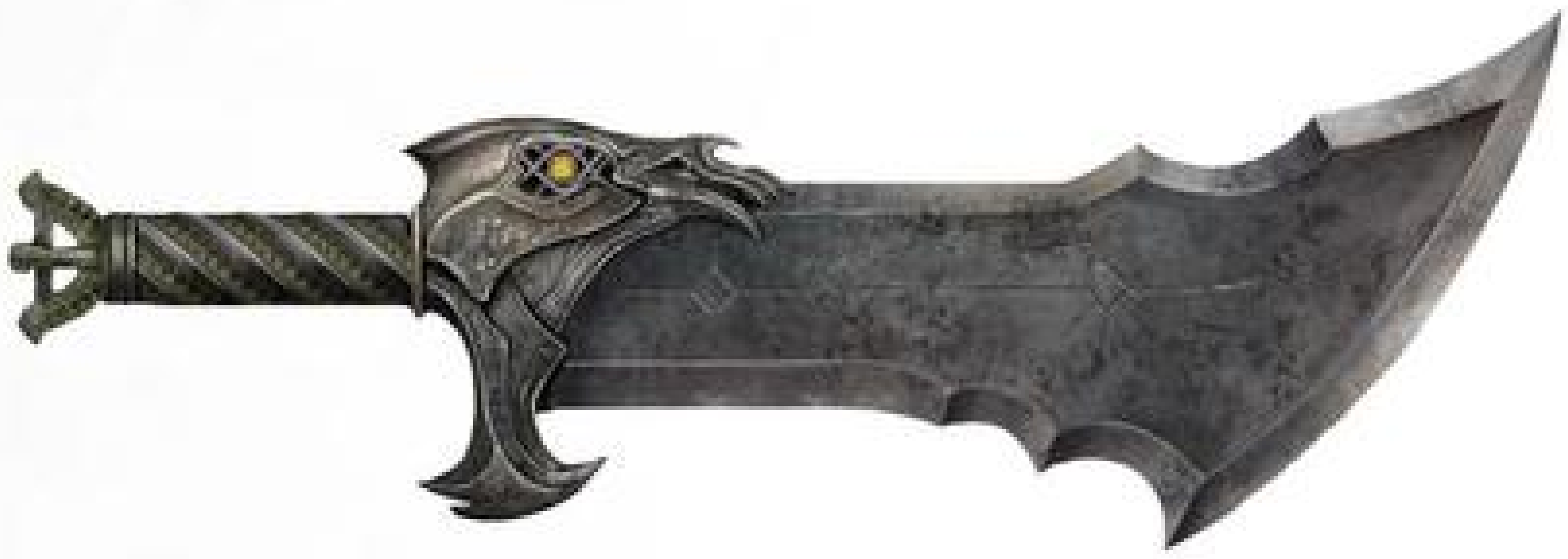
"Atreus is one of the most complex characters we were designing, since he needed to show vulnerability as a kid yet also be competent, along with rapid evolution and growth," Cabrera said. "He is also kind of a mystery in himself, so we wanted to show him in continuity with the character as a kid but be very creative in the shapes and in the use of materials and creature skins in his costume."

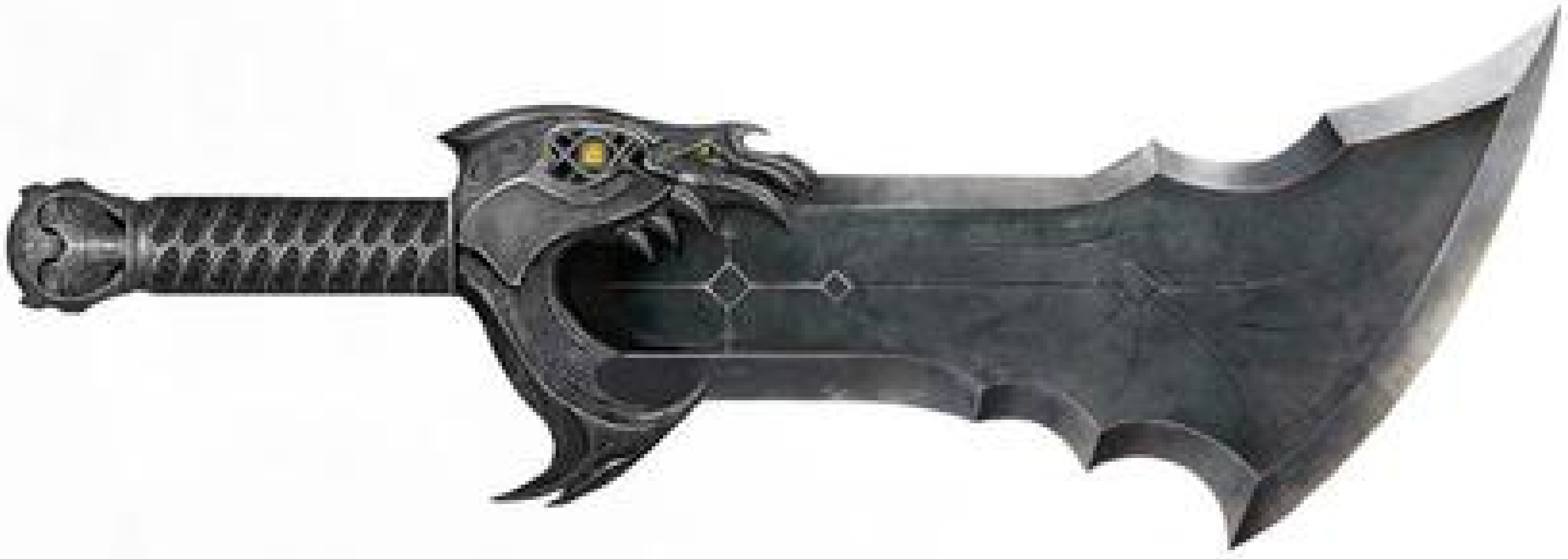
KRATOS' WEAPON

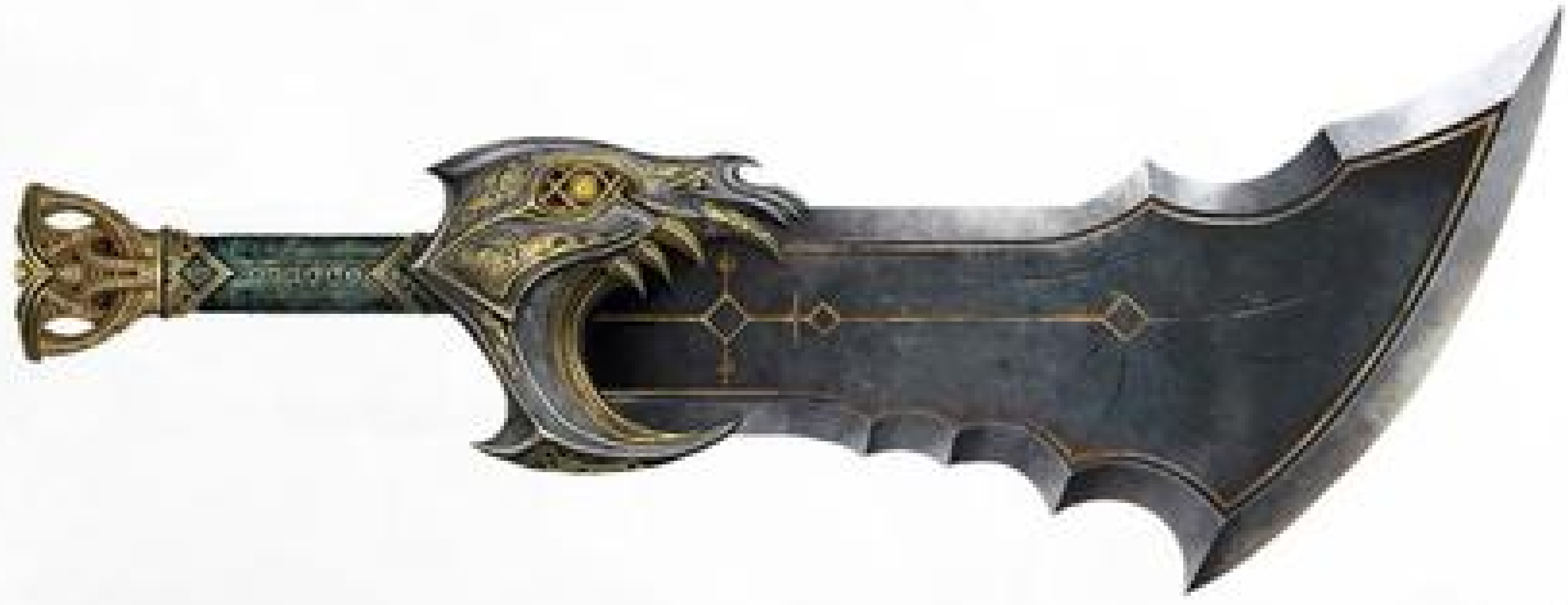
To know Kratos' story is to know the weapons he carries: the Blades of Chaos and the Leviathan Axe. The epically sized axe became a part of the god's story in the previous game, forged by the Huldra brothers. Brok and Sindri continue to hone its design. Kligerman said, "We went through a ton of exploration and variations for this game's axe progression. We pushed the world serpent motif, and you can see the snake climbing up the handle in the final progression. We considered an all-gold axe blade, but we decided to go with a more classical look, since the Huldras are upgrading it again, and logically, they'd design it similarly to how they designed it last time."

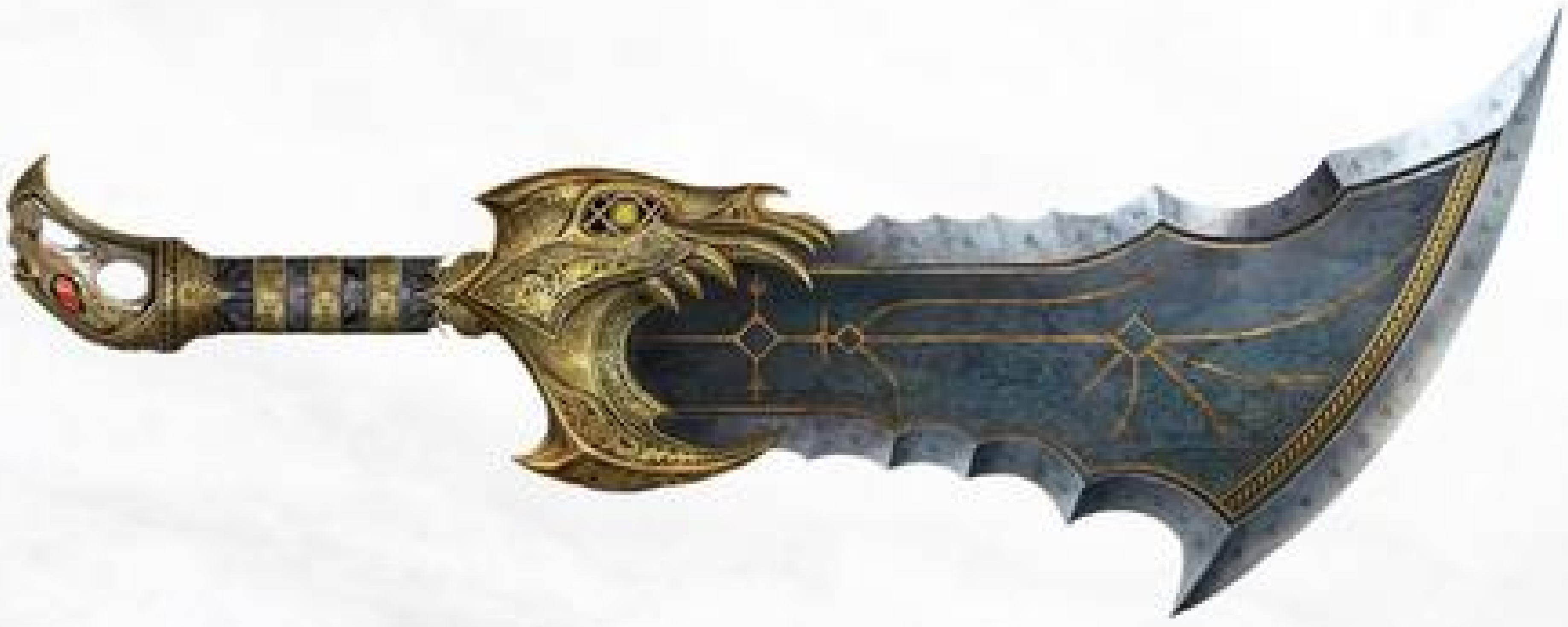
Artists: Yefim Kligerman (right); Stephen Oakley (left)

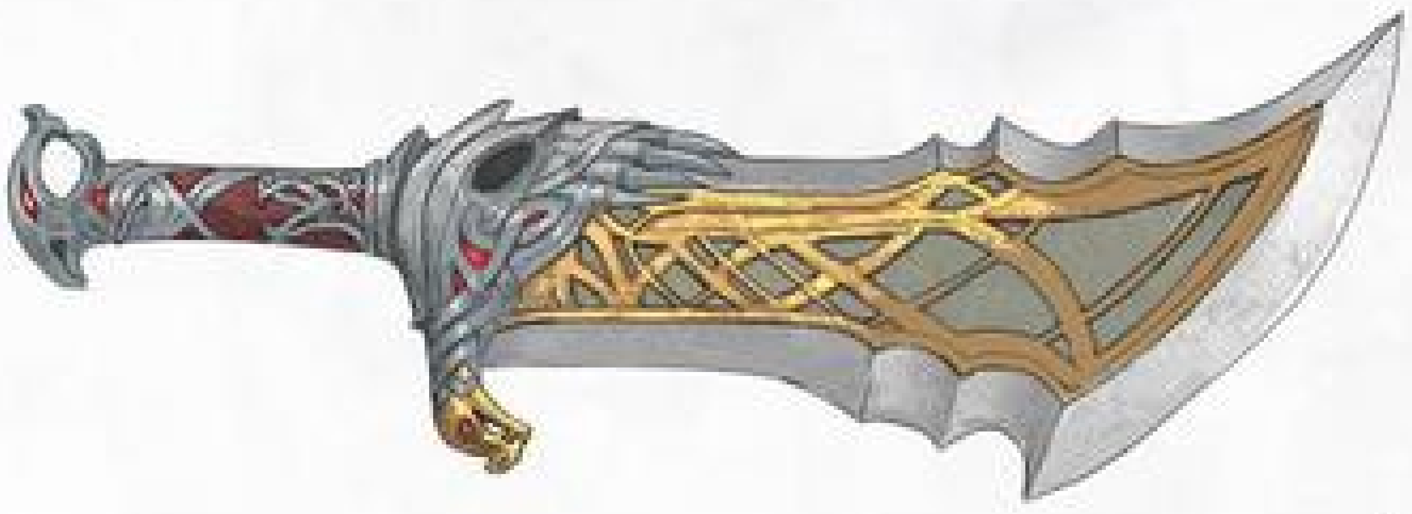


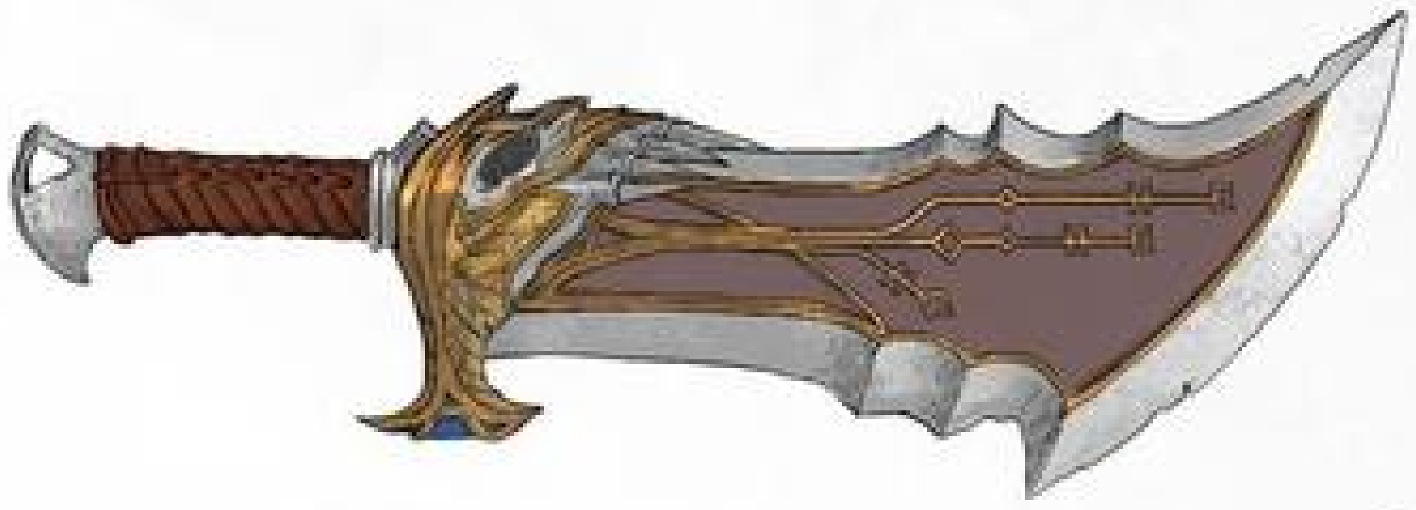


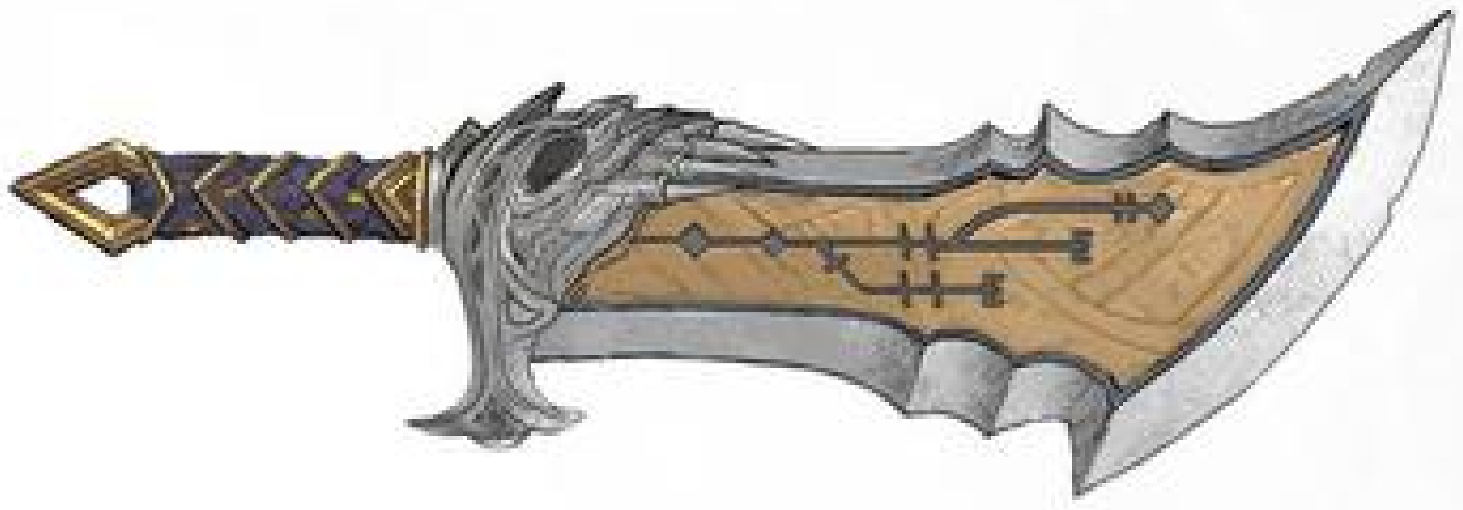


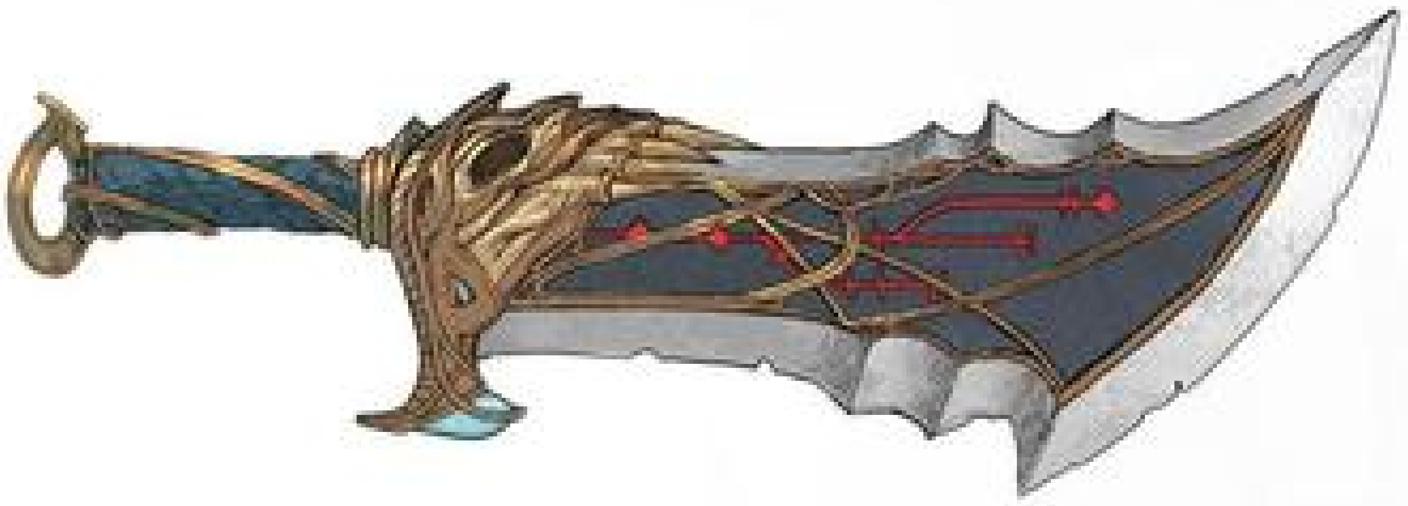


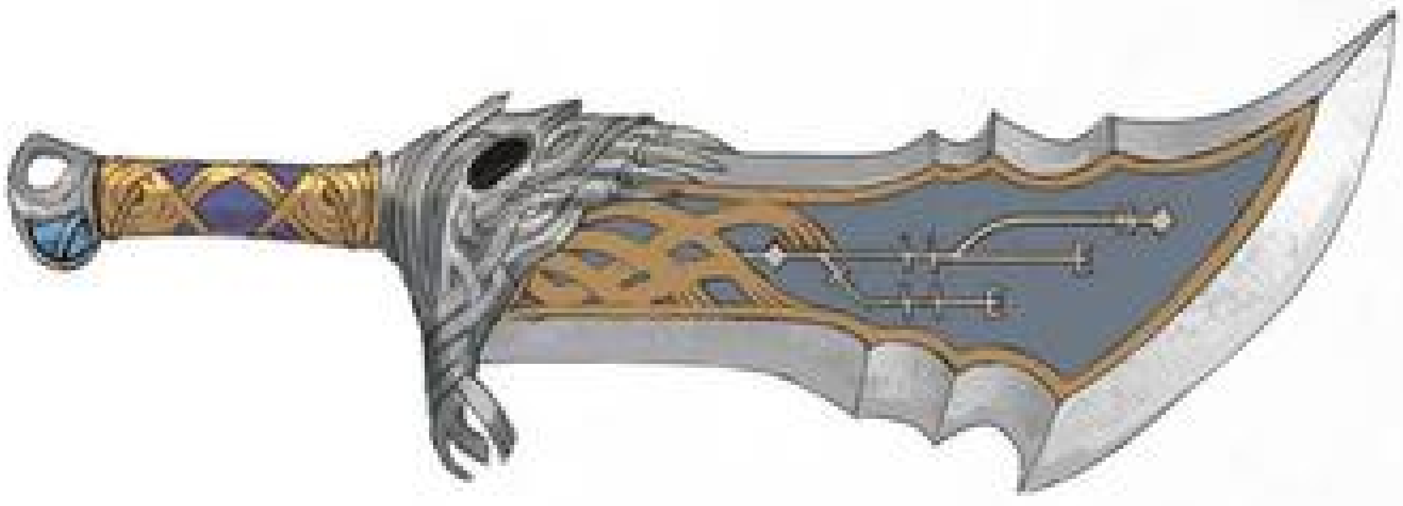


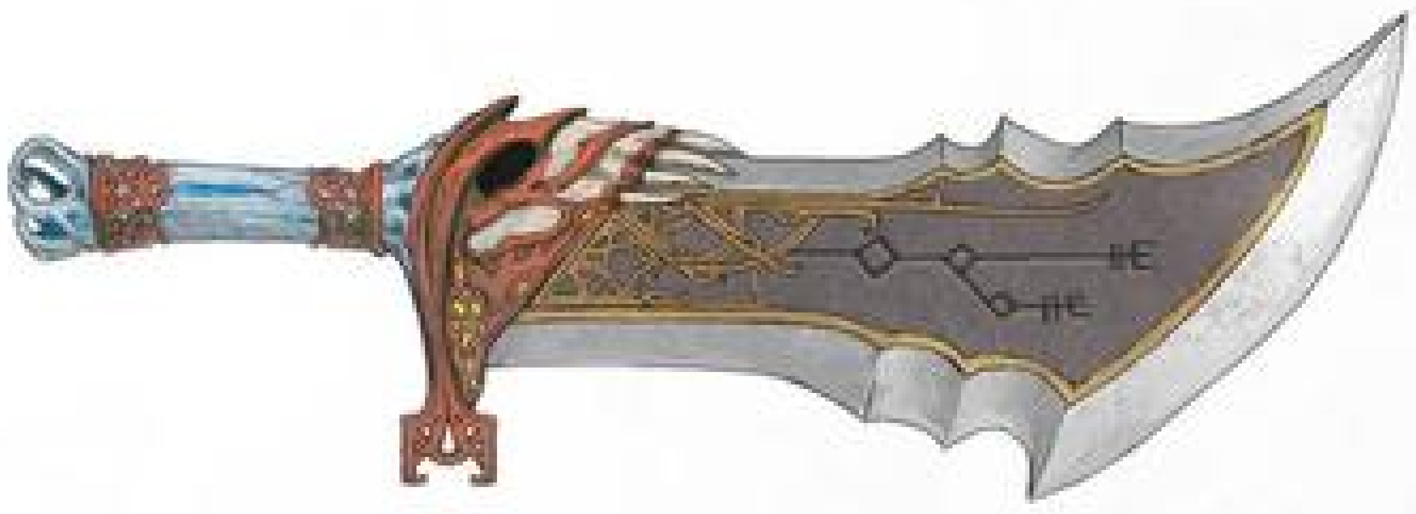


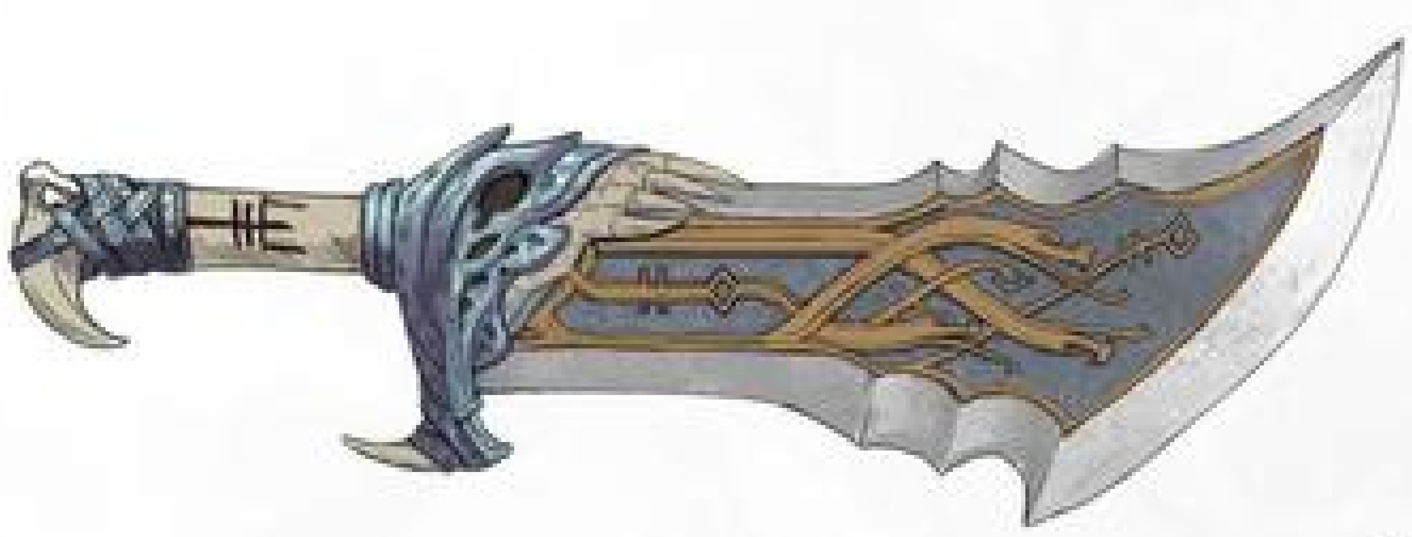


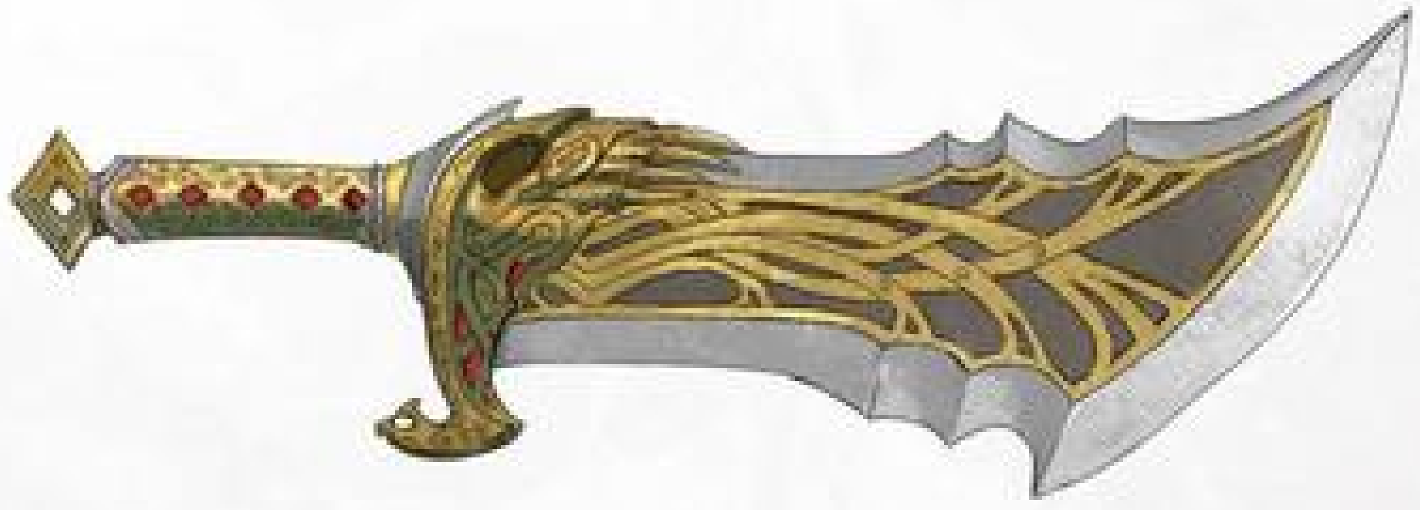


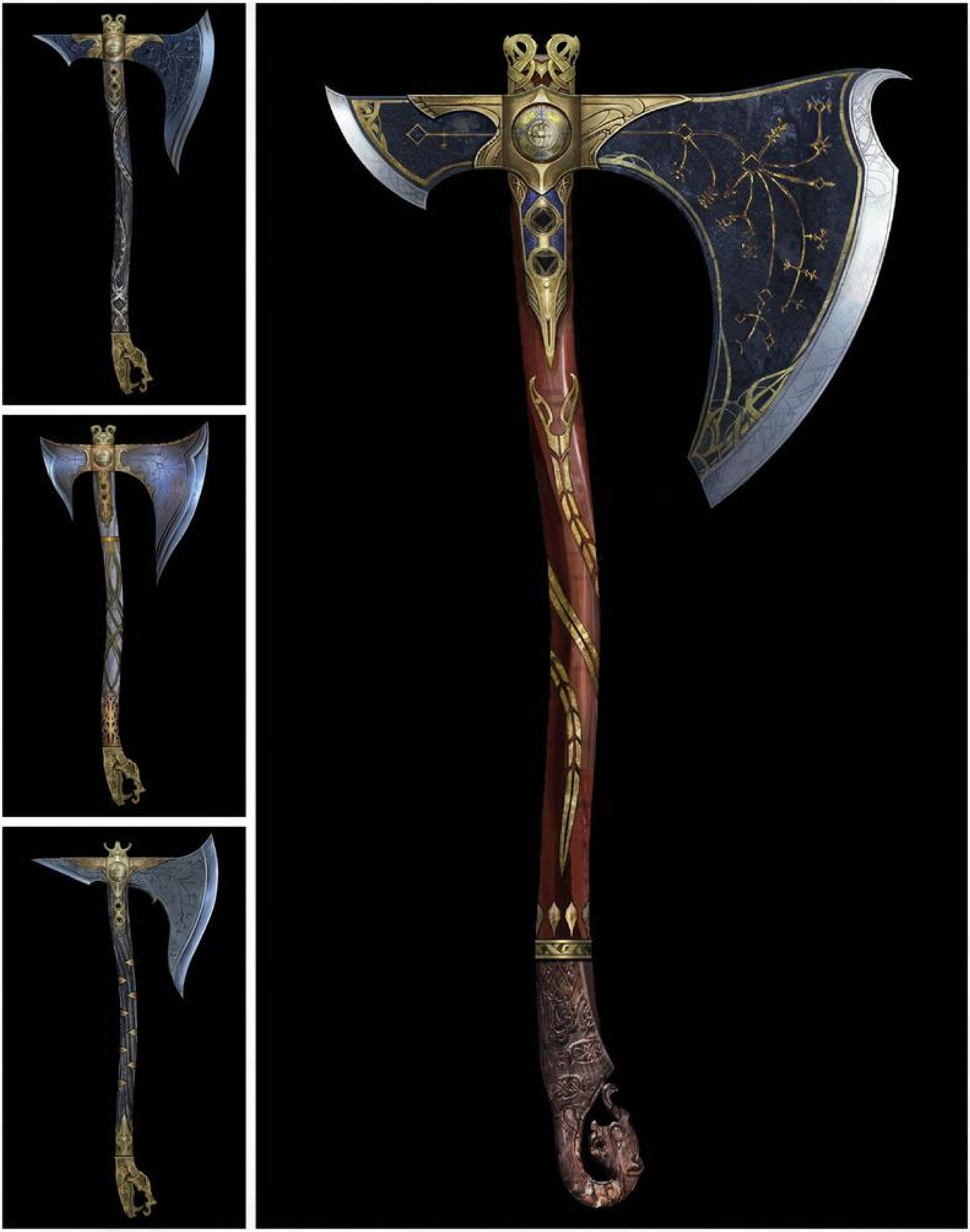






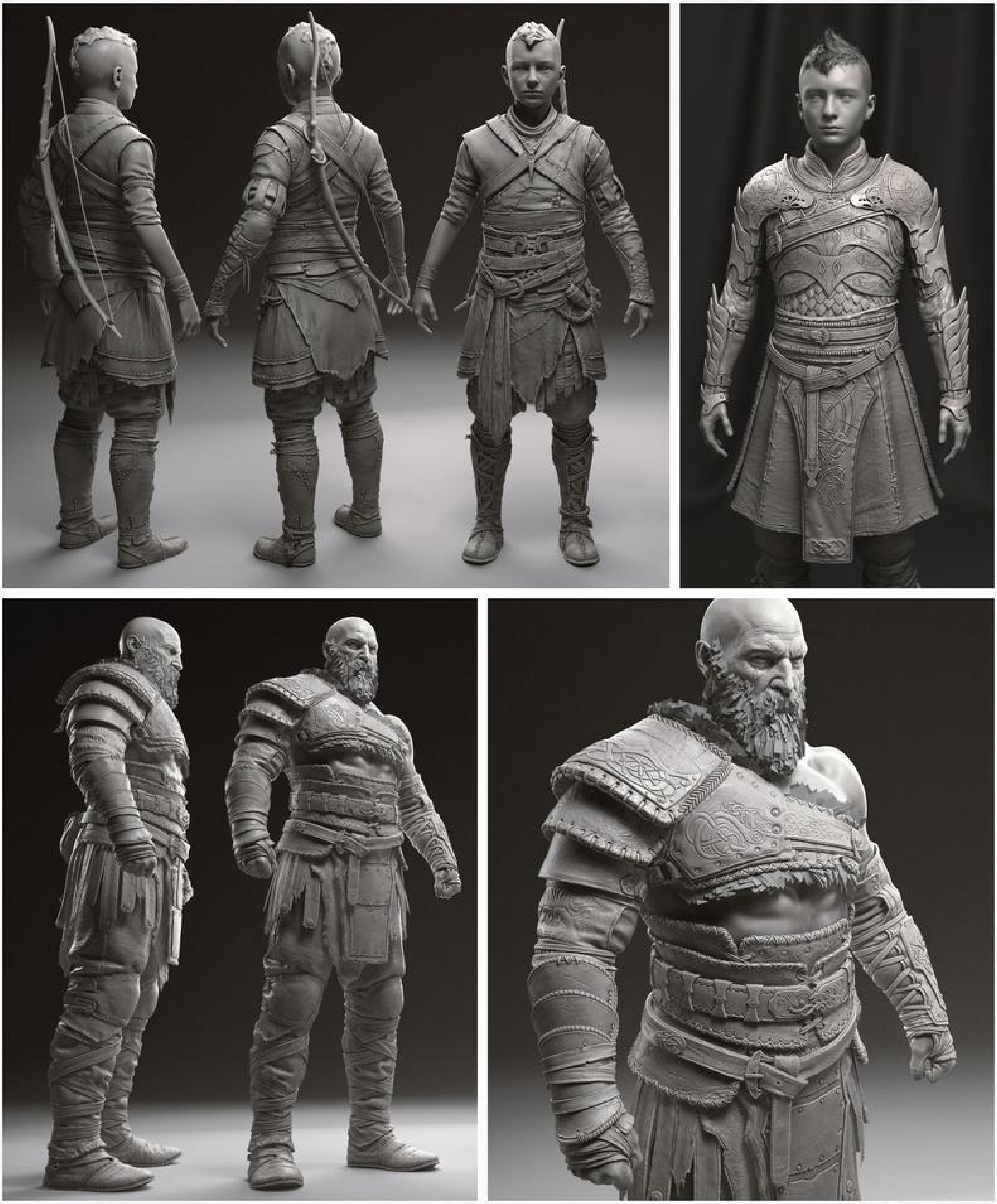






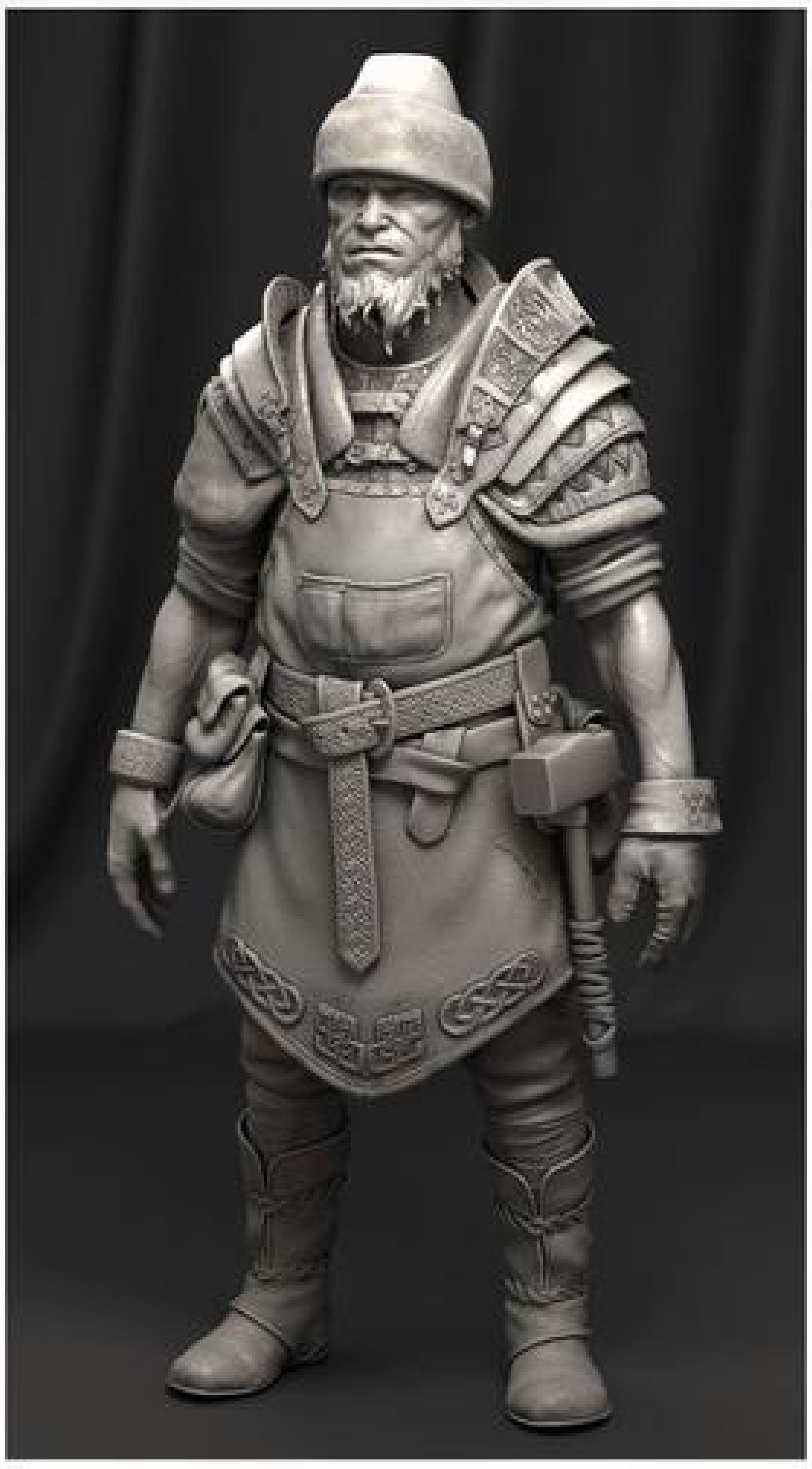
Upgrading the Leviathan Axe. Artist: Yefim Kligerman

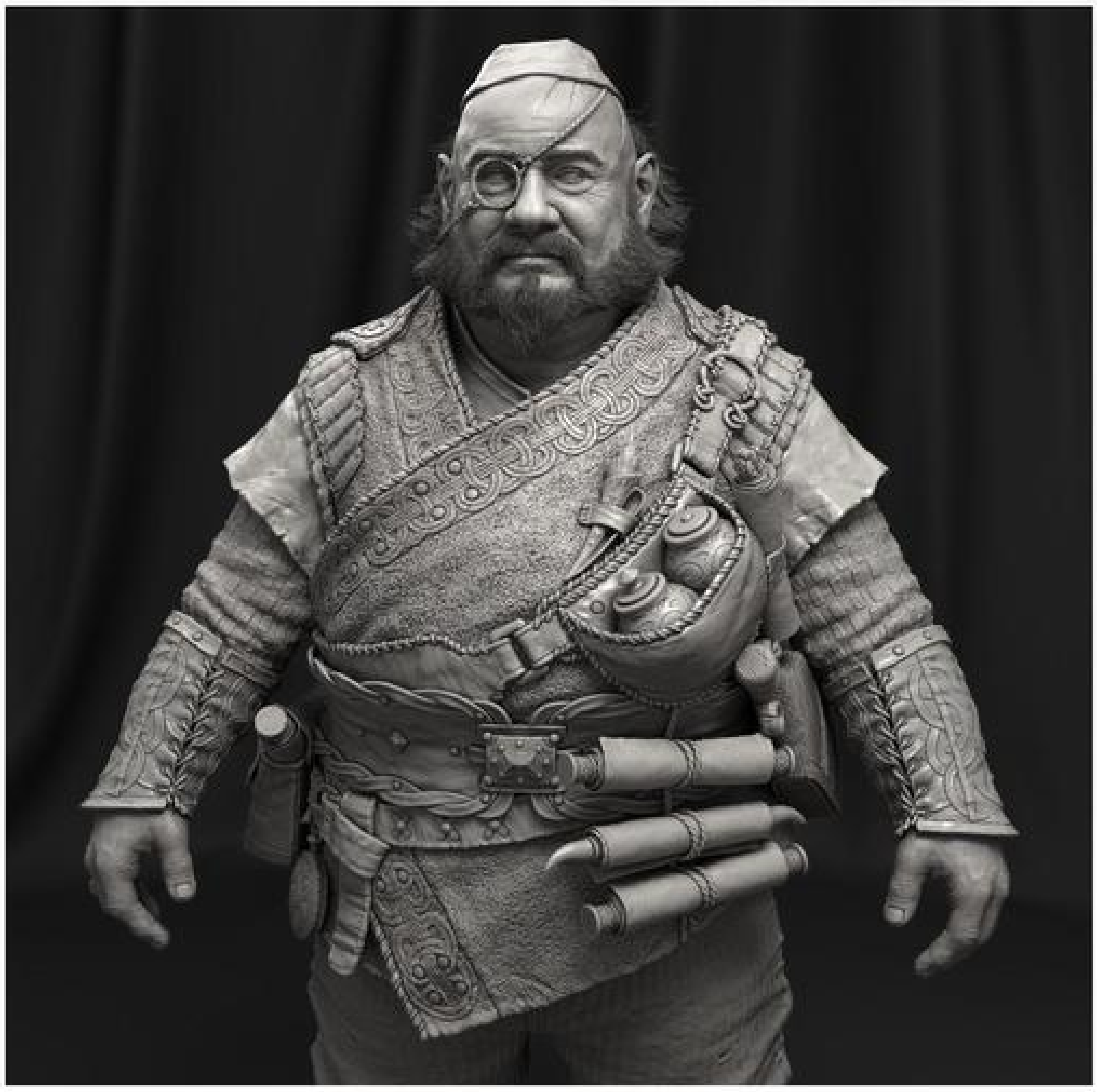
Atreus' and Kratos' 3D models. Artists: Eric Valdes (top left and bottom); Adam Rehmann (top right)

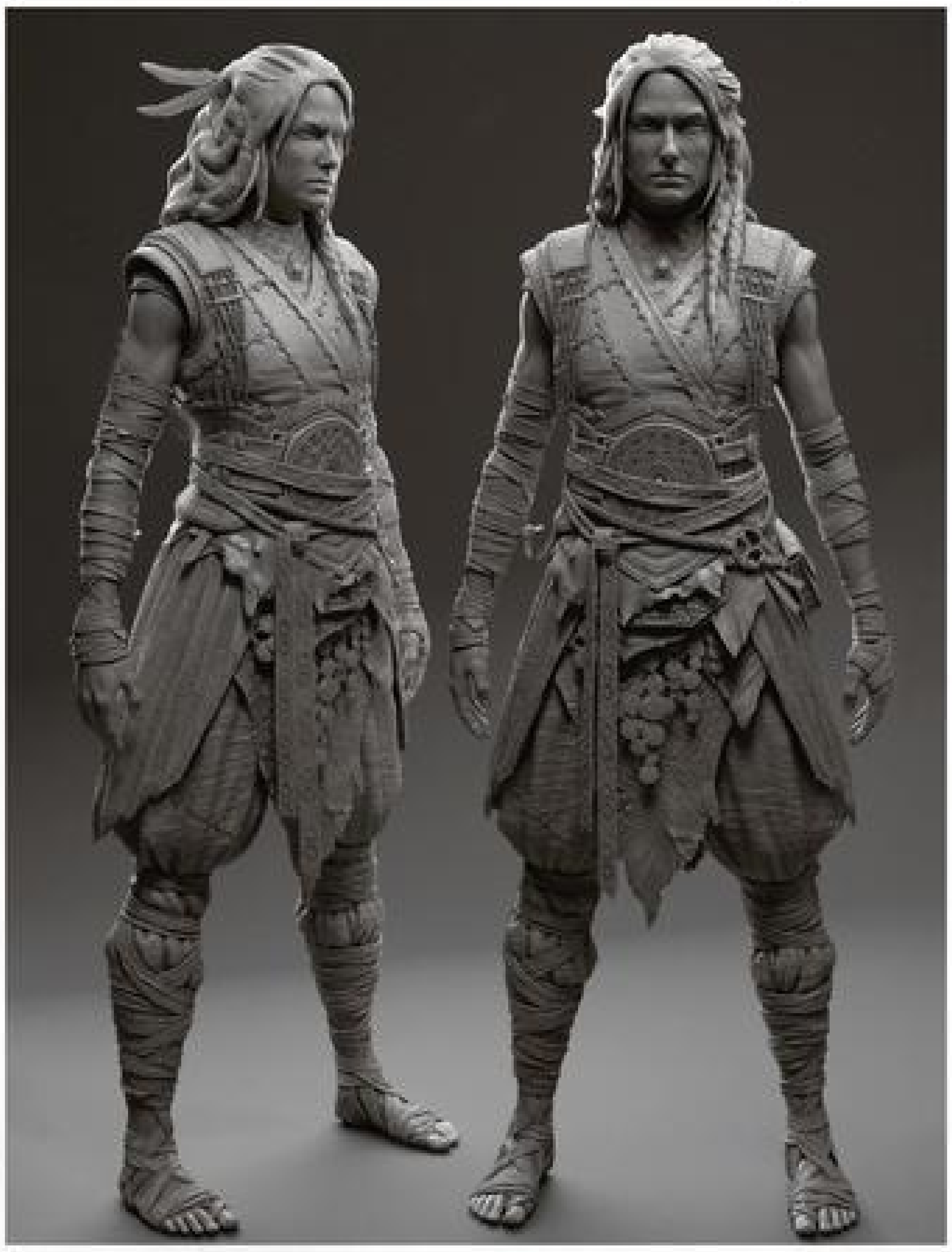


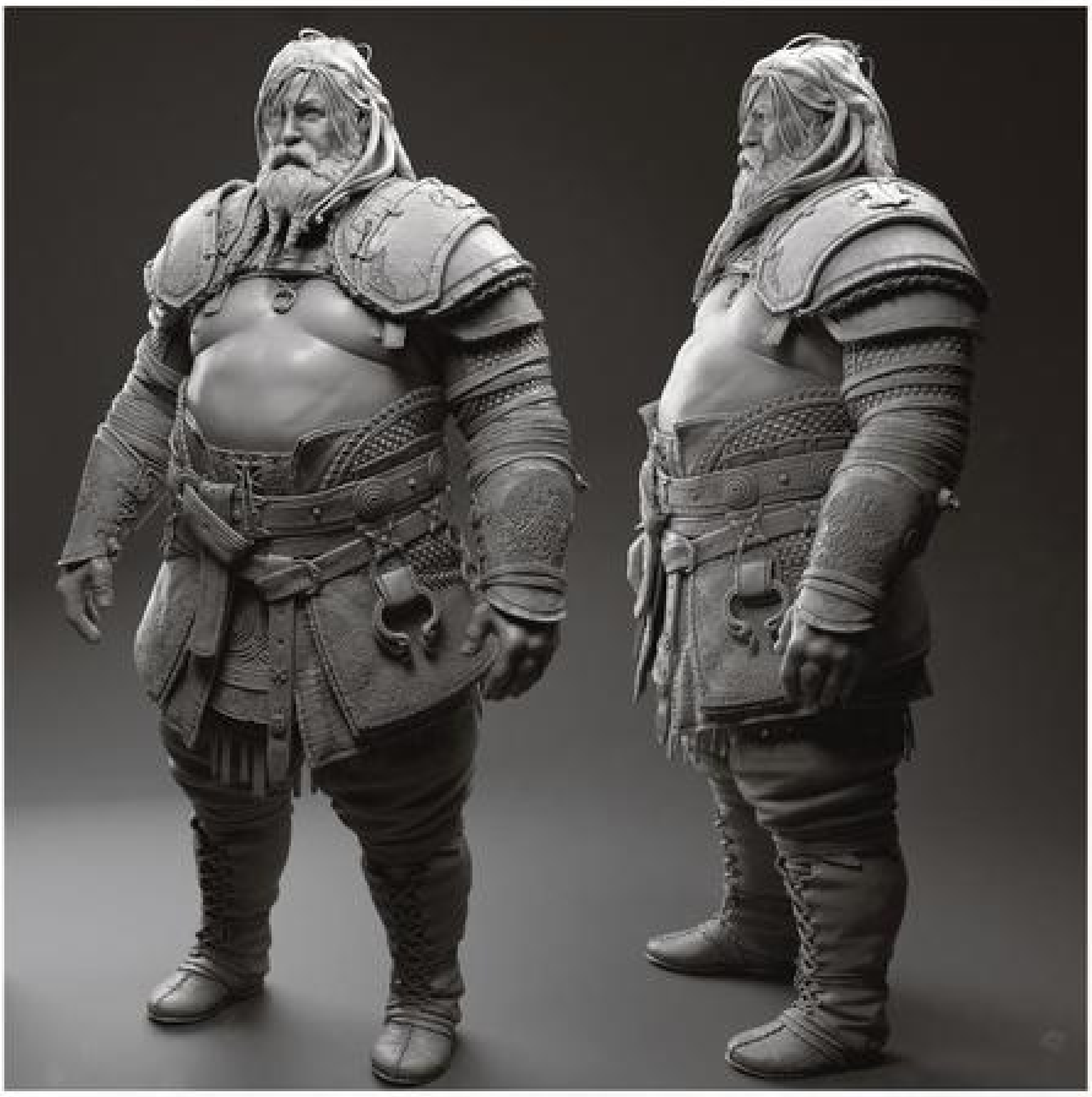
"By the time I started to sculpt Atreus and Kratos, many great minds had already combined their talents to land on a nearly perfect design for our game," lead character artist Eric Valdes said. "My hands had the great pleasure to make their 2D dreams come to life in 3D. I aimed for each piece of digital clay to represent the elegance of their concepts but also to be strong enough to hold up to the demands of a franchise."

3D models for various supporting characters. Artists: Adam Rehmann (top left); Josiah Scholten (top right); Eric Valdes (bottom)



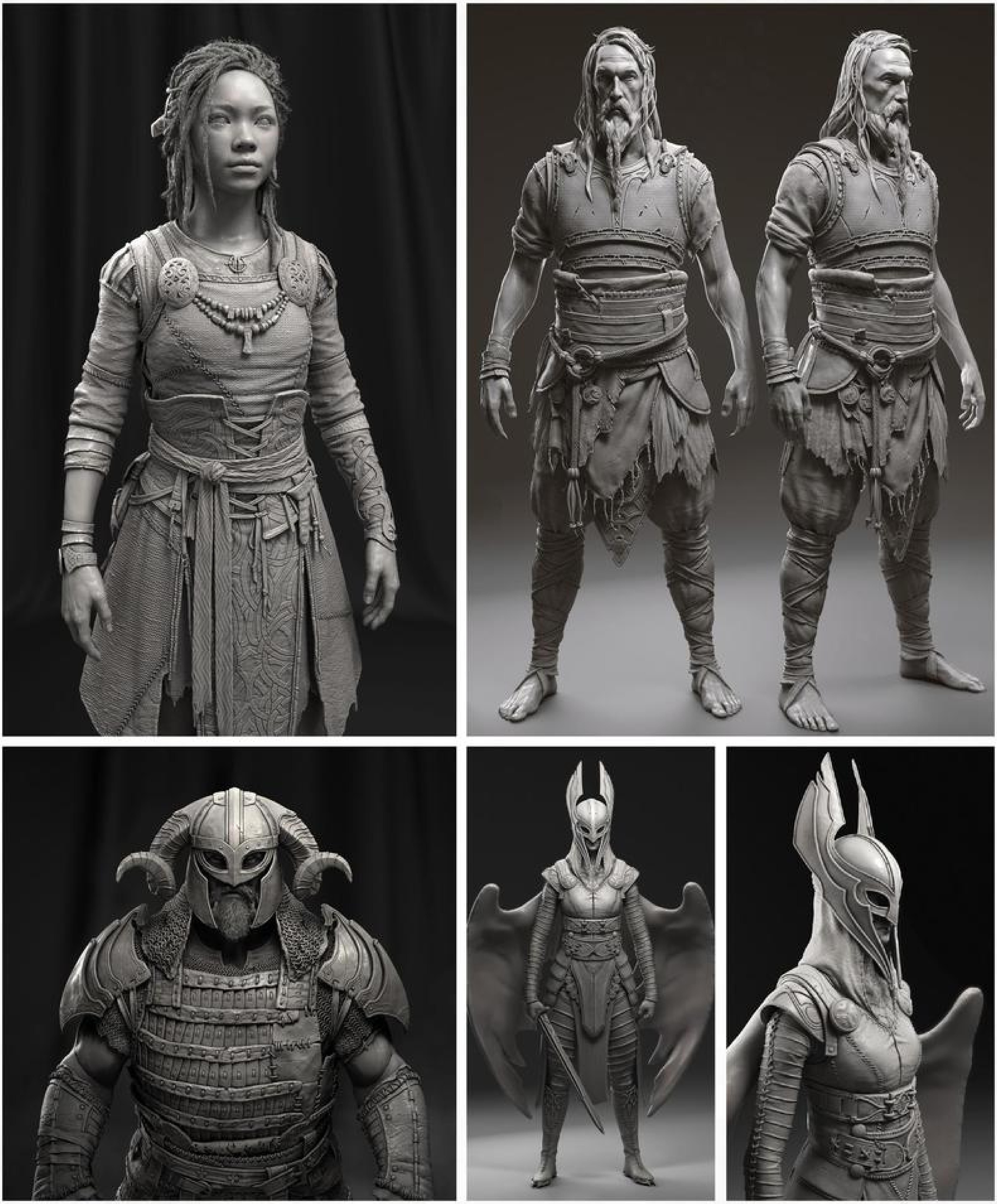






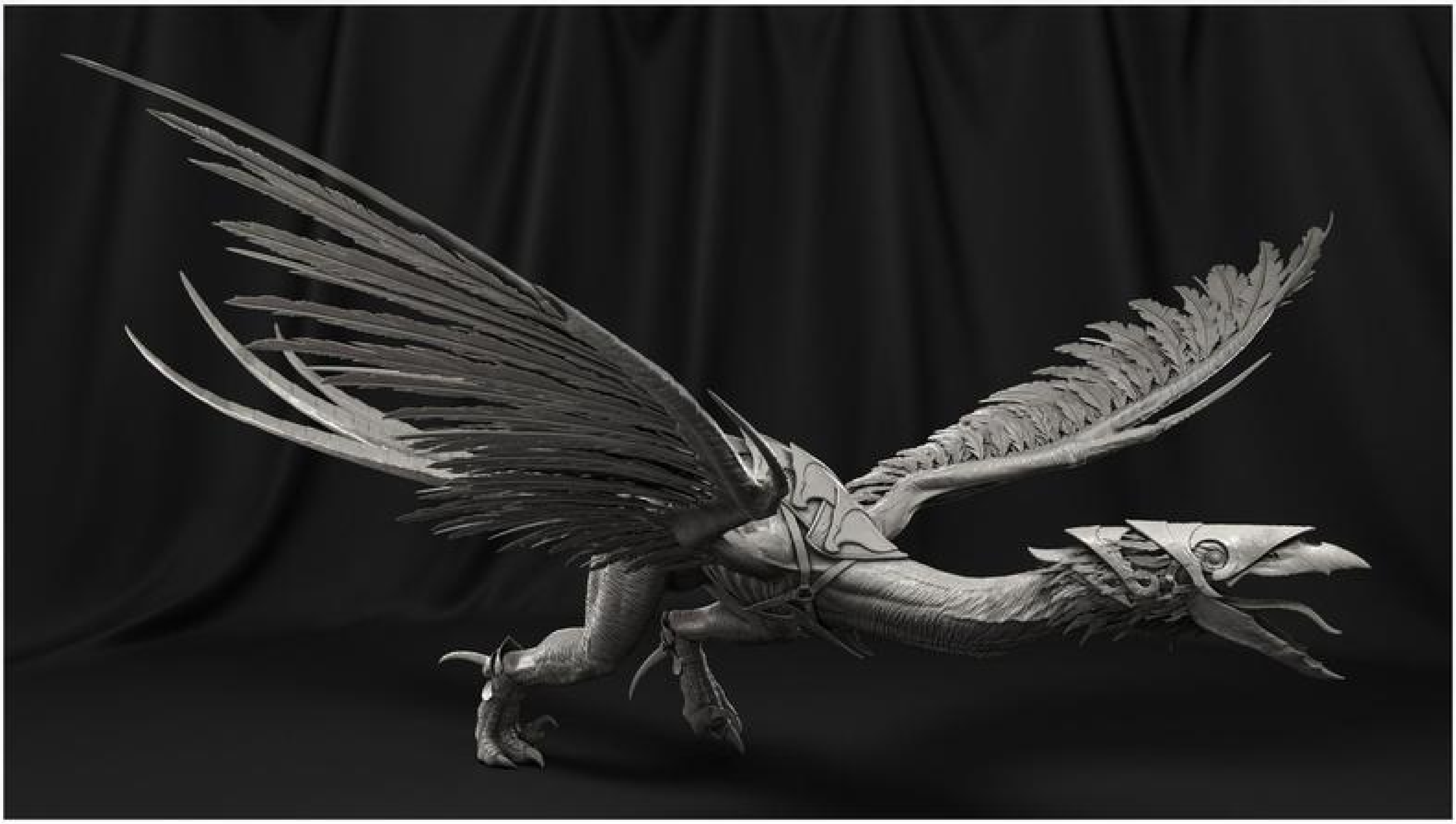
"Updating Brok's sculpt from 2018's *God of War* was an exciting challenge for me, not only because he's one of my favorite characters but also because the original sculpt had established the look of a franchise," character artist Angela Rico said. "This asset taught me a lot about the art style of the studio—hand sculpting everything with love and dedication, as opposed to trying to get quick results with scans or cloth simulation programs."

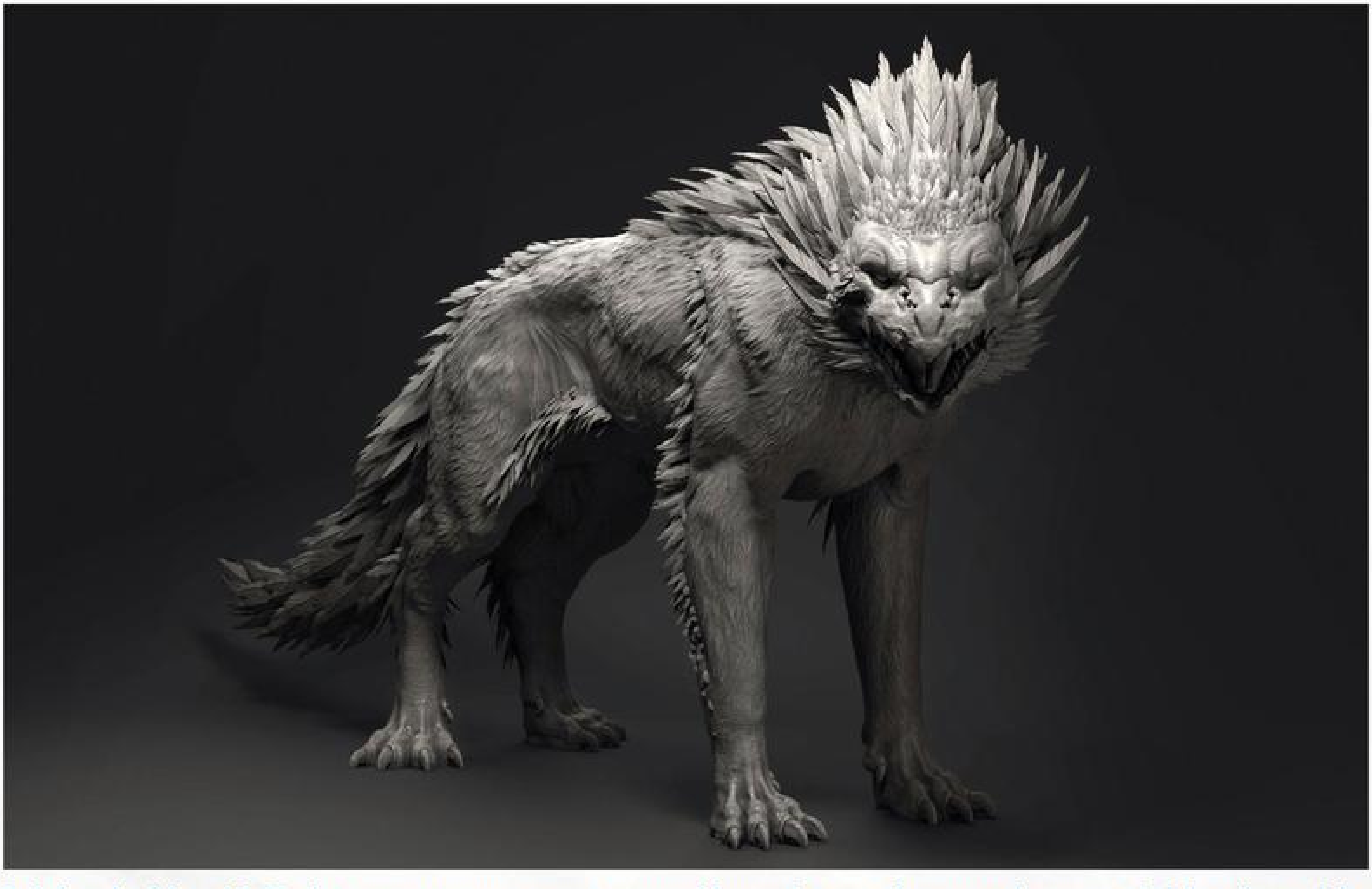
Angrboda and Týr character models. Artists: Josiah Scholten (top left); Eric Valdes (top right, bottom center, and bottom right); Spyro Alexander (bottom left)



Sculpts bring details into sharp relief, highlighting aspects about a character that are unique and special. Character artist Josiah Scholten sculpted the little accessories in Angrboda's hair and the snake-like forms throughout her outfit. Meanwhile, character artist Spyro Alexander sculpted the Einherjar heavy class and emphasized the warrior as a menacing brute. "It was a very challenging piece that really pushed everything I had learned on previous tasks," Alexander said.

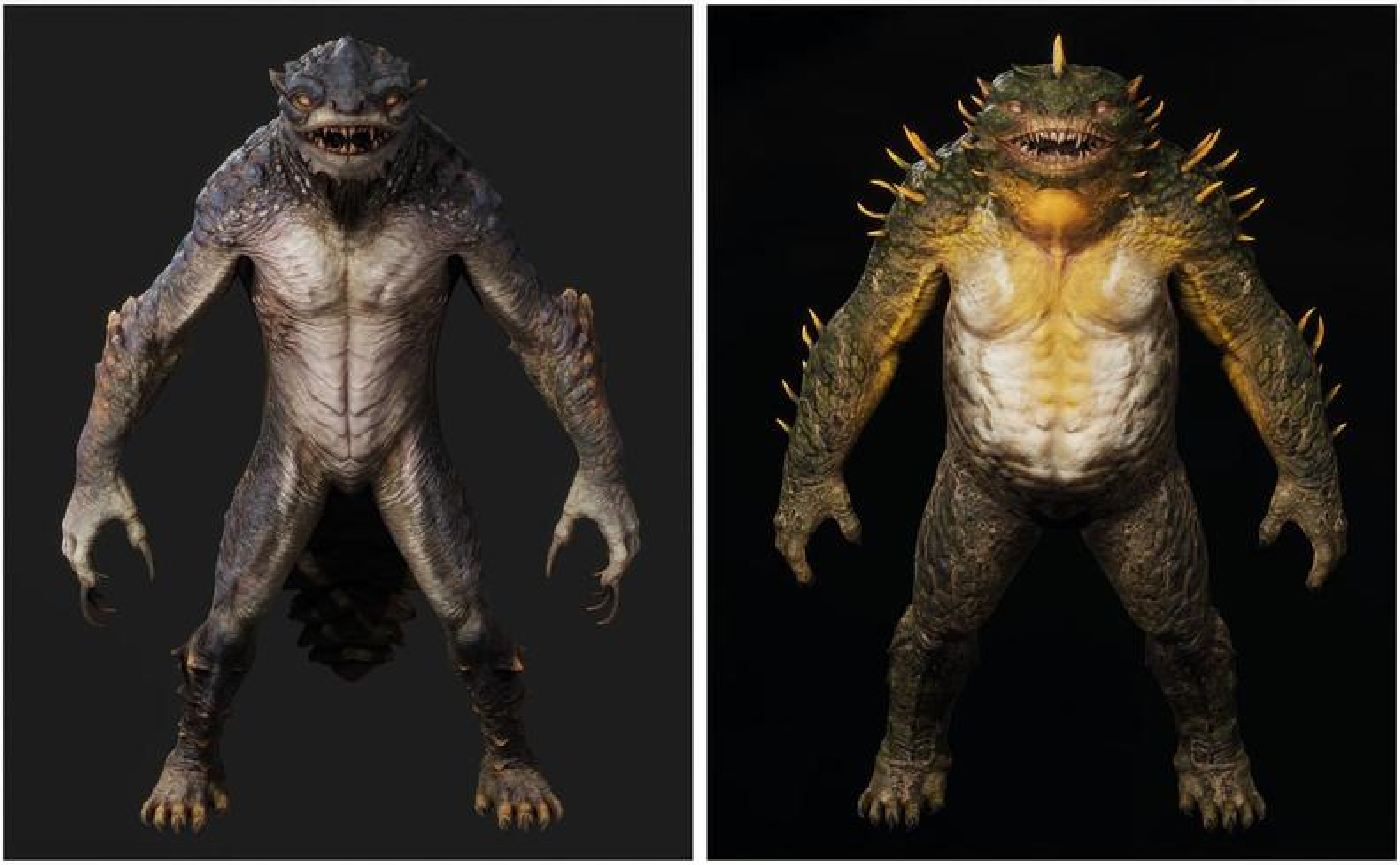
Realm glider and Vanaheim ravager sculpts. Artists: Alec Hunstad (top); Adam Rehmann (bottom)

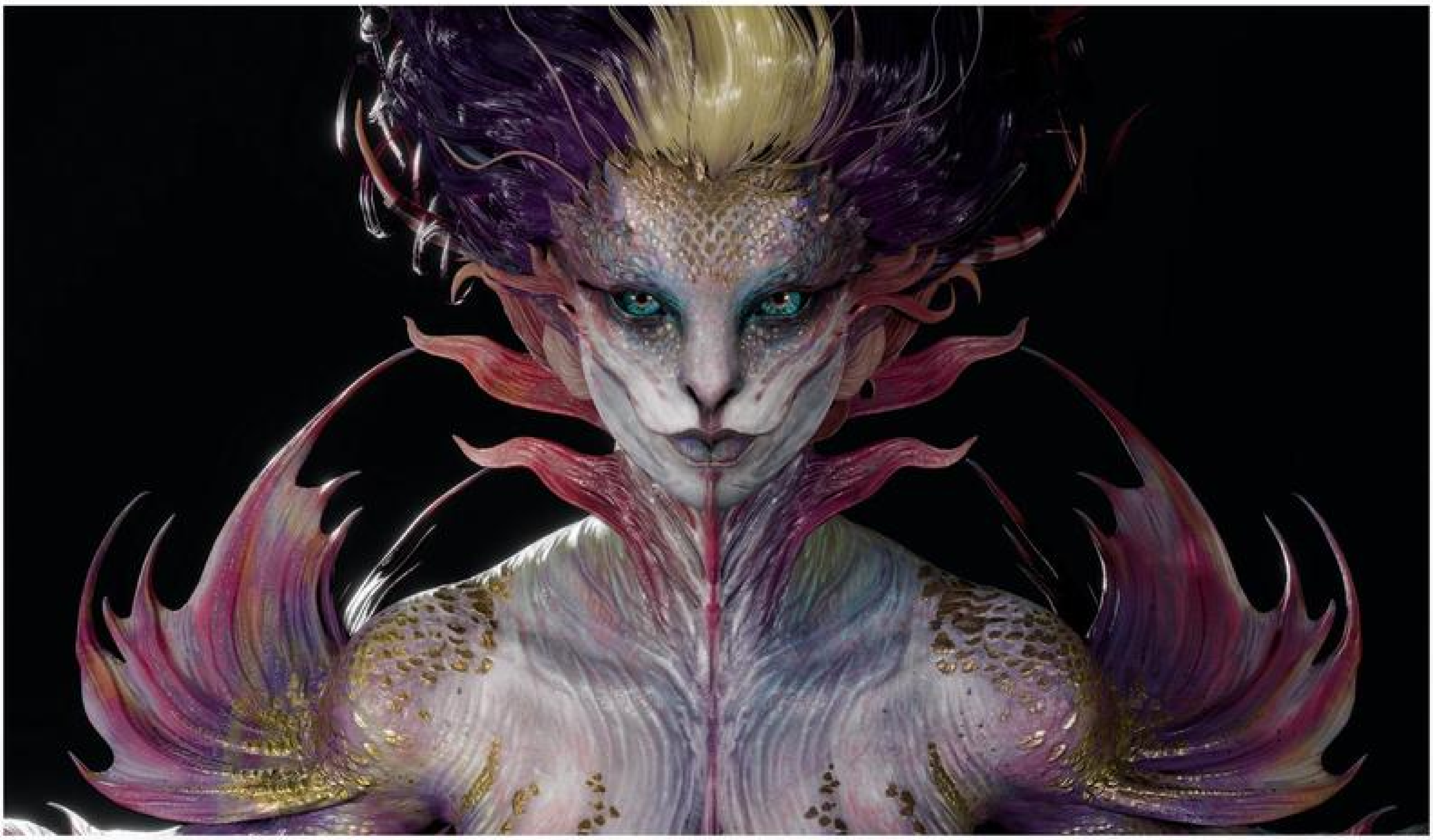




Both the realm glider and the Vanaheim ravager creature concepts incorporated features that appear dangerous and aggressive, which the sculpts needed to represent in-game. That meant shaping the pointed feathers and curved beaks in the models. Rico said the ravager marked the first creature she sculpted for *Ragnarök*, and she worked closely with her art director to capture the creature's essence in 3D.

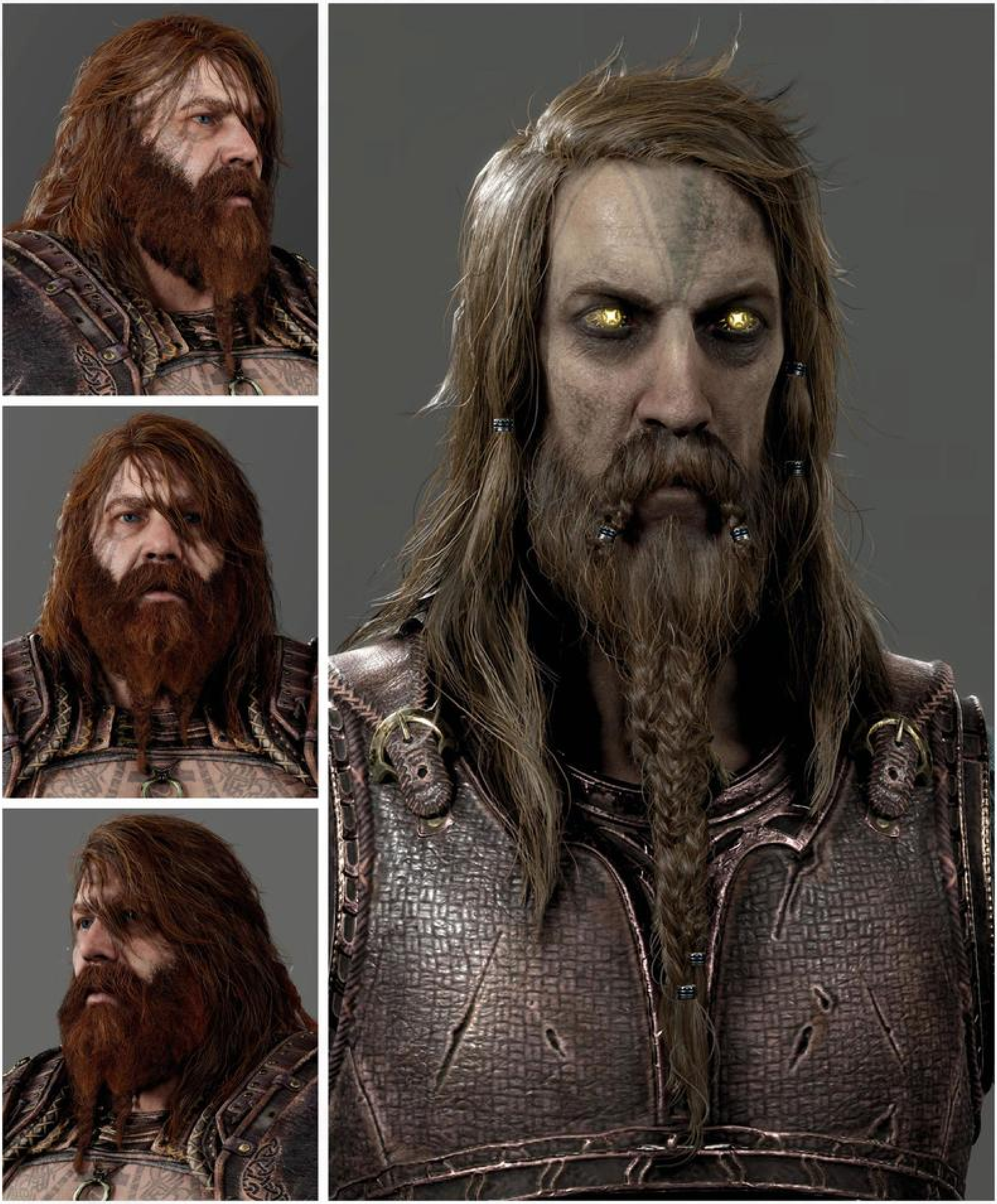
Cave dweller modeling. Artist: Andrew Ariza





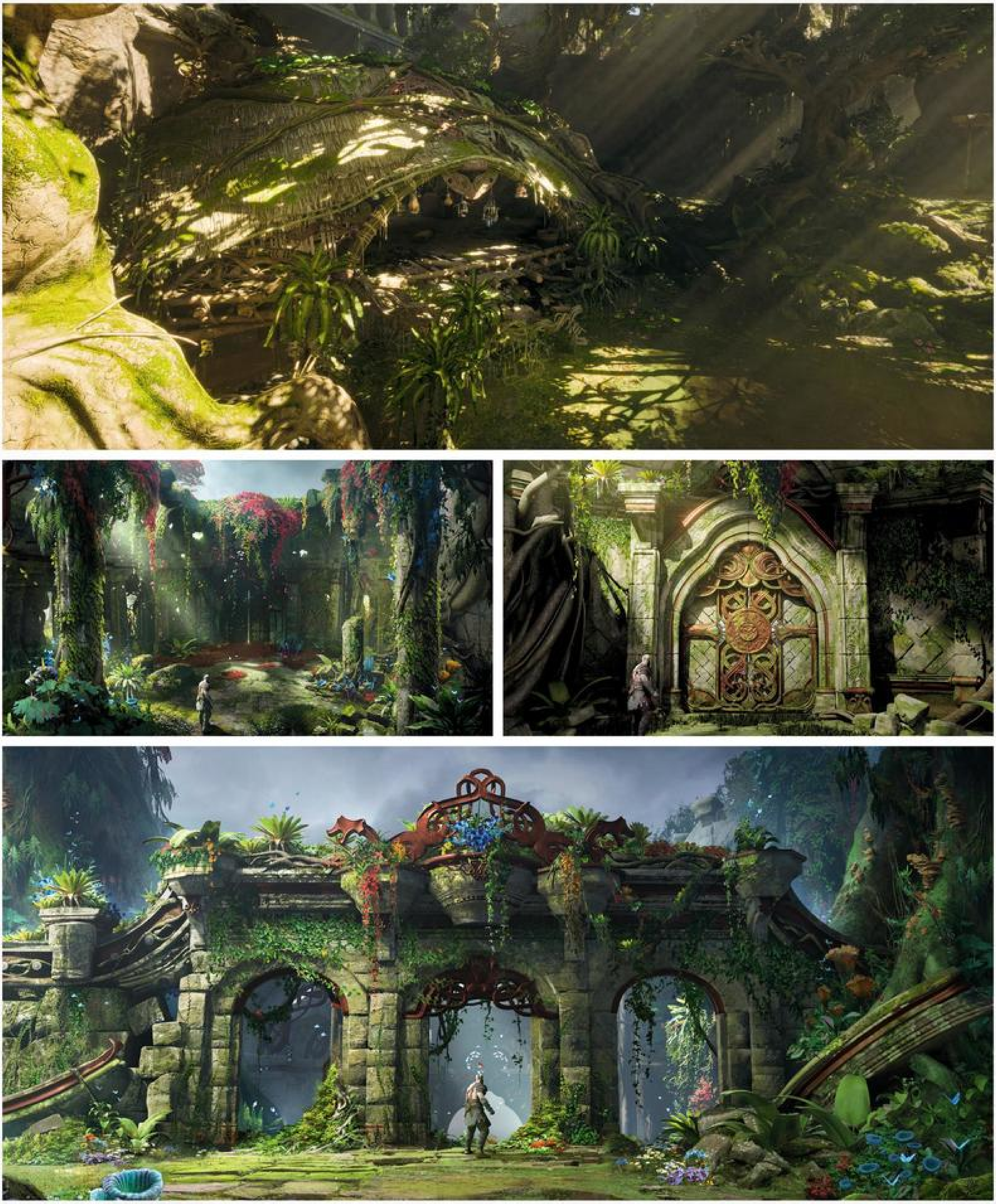
"We sculpted the ironsmith mermaid using numerous sea-life references: iridescent birds and fish, as well as moray eel and octopus skin details, were used as inspiration for her model," senior character artist Andrew Ariza said. "The task was to create a beautiful, charismatic, and memorable female character without shying away from the predatory characteristics attached to these well-known mythological beings."

Modeling Thor's and Týr's hair. Artist: Amanda Irani



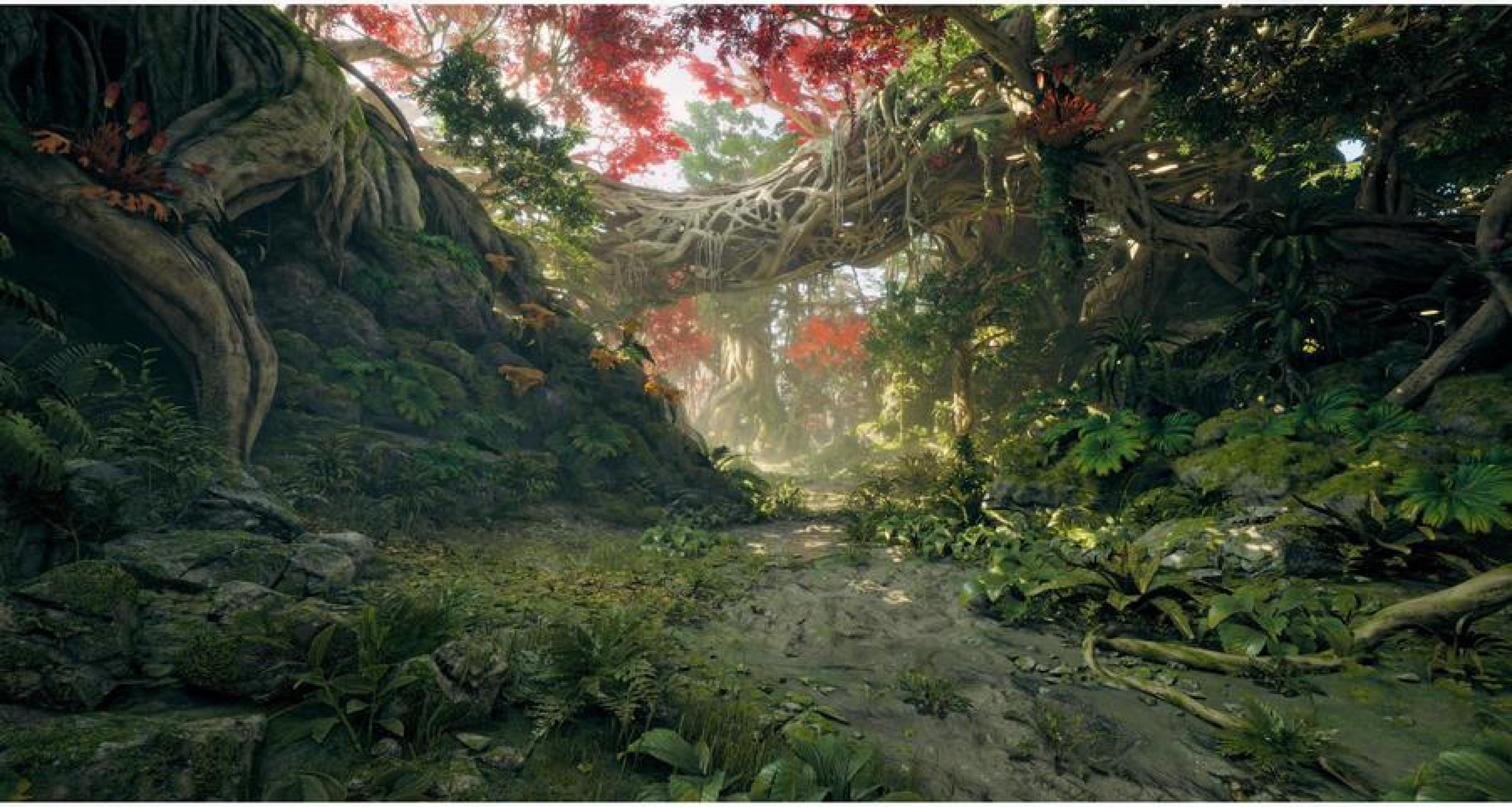
"My first thought when I approach a hairstyle is 'What is the shape language of this character's design?'" character artist Amanda Irani said. "Both characters' hairstyles possess an unkempt quality; however, Thor's design language is robust and hearty, while Týr's is lean and angular. It was important to me that the shape language was carried through to the hairstyles while staying faithful to the concepts and having a readable silhouette at all angles."

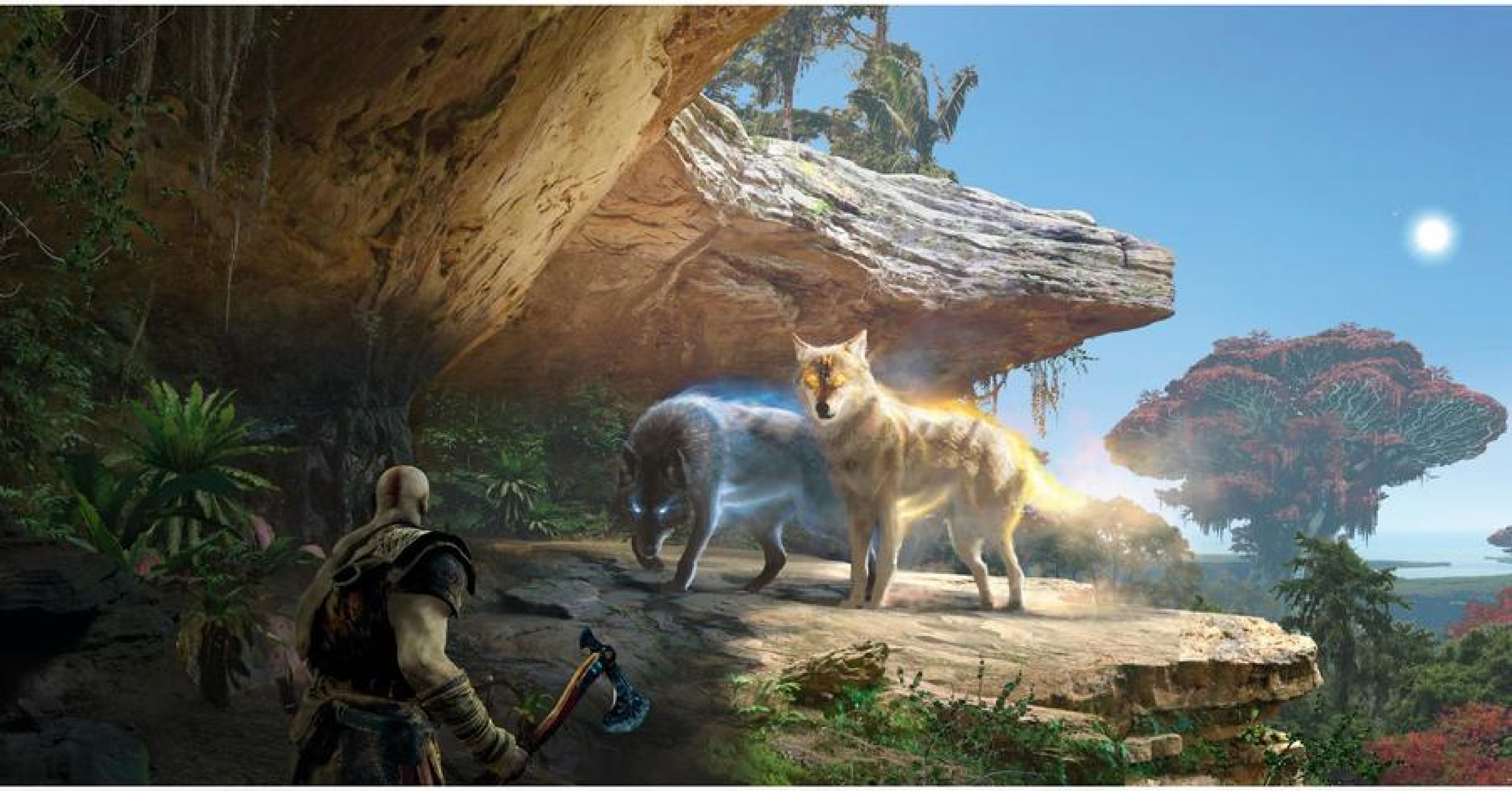
Inside Freya's garden. Artists: Aaron Contreras, Lina Li, Sup Choi, Justin Hammond (top); Norris Lin (middle and bottom)



Freya's home comes with an artful garden. The artists infused the space with serenity and beauty, filling it with colorful and flourishing plants. Lin said, "The architectural structure is inspired by some of the abbey ruins in Europe, with large overhanging elements and gateways. It gives us an opportunity to create an enclosed space where you are surrounded by the overgrown plants."

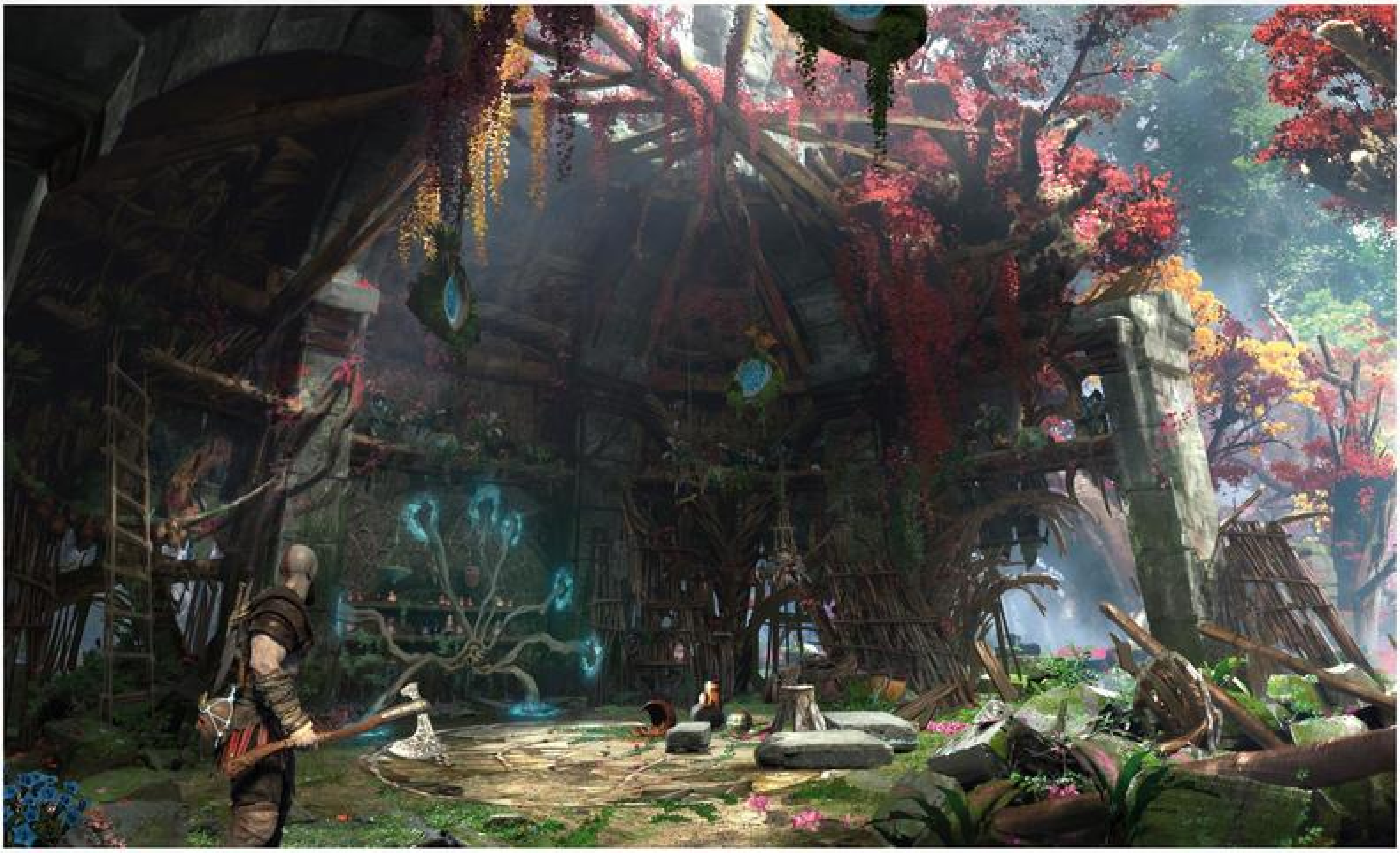
Exploring Sköll and Hati's den. Artists: Aaron Contreras, Justin Hammond (top); Mark Castanon (bottom)

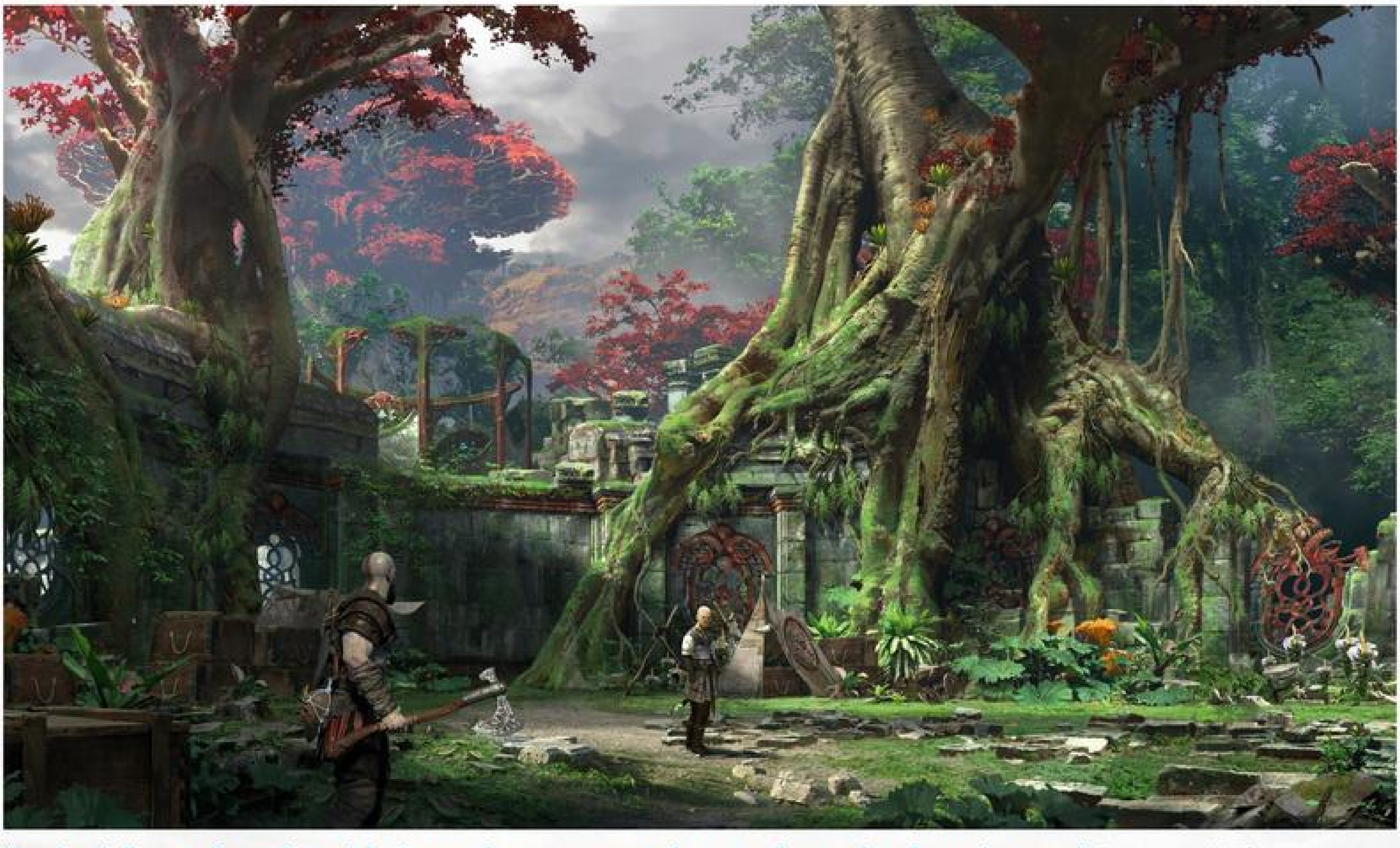




"For the Vanaheim temple prison area, the biggest challenge for me was determining how to keep players from getting lost in this massive jungle with similar trees and vegetation everywhere," 3D environment artist Lina Li said. "Putting small points of interest in each area helped me solve this problem—things like a few weird-looking roots intertwining with each other on the side of the road."

Vanaheim combat space concepts. Artist: Mark Castanon



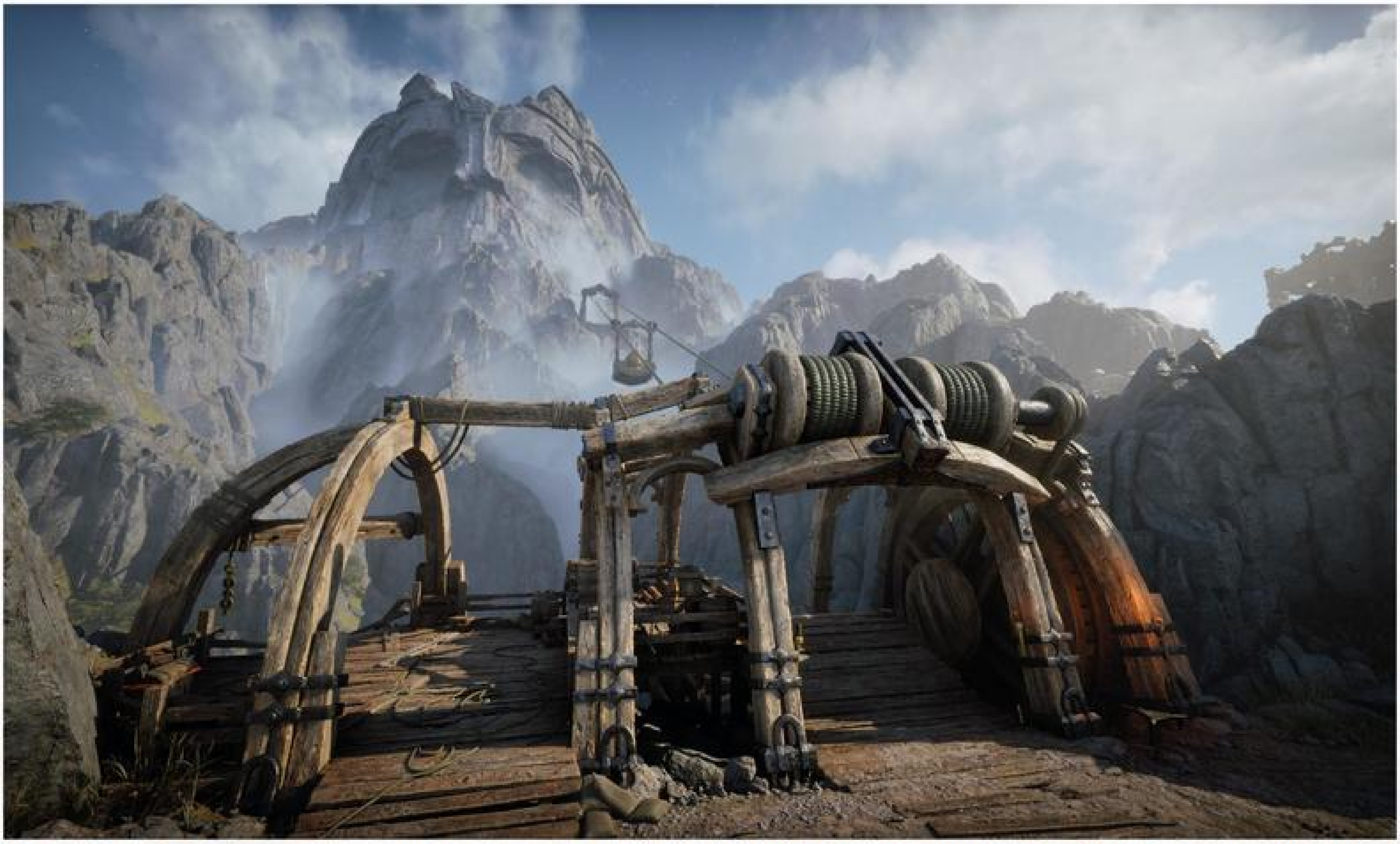


"Another challenge we face with visual development for environments is the varying functionality of gameplay spaces," Castanon said. "The top image was necessary for a key cinematic moment in the game. When designing spaces like this, we must be conscious of the area the animation and camera teams need to occupy for the sake of character movement. The bottom image represents a combat space, which demands a more open area so as not to obstruct combat."

Vanaheim at night. Artists: Aaron Contreras, Kevin Johnson

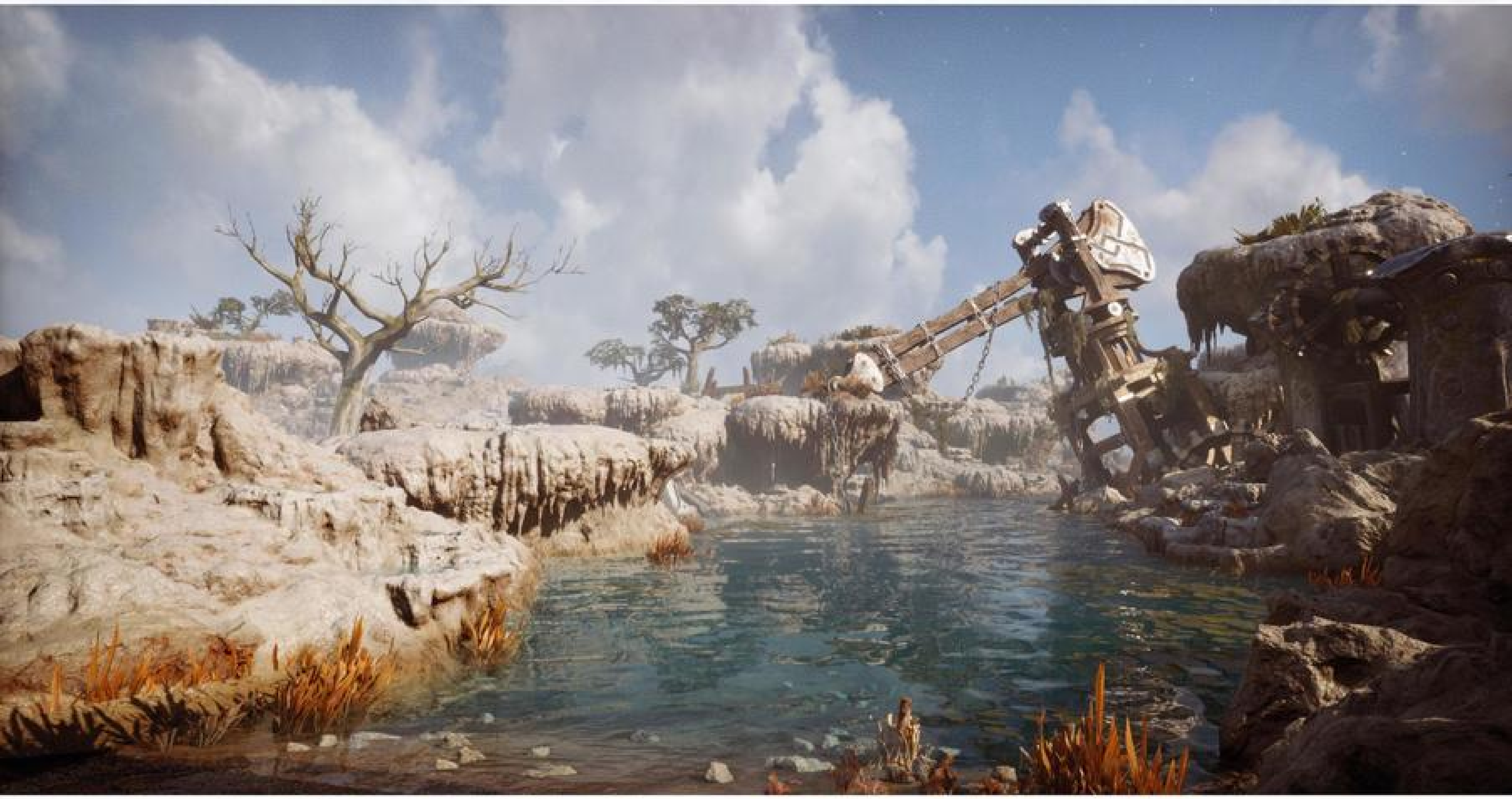
The artists didn't have a plethora of references for Vanaheim, which has little visual representation in Norse mythology and popular media. They wanted the realm to feel grounded in reality and not venture too far into alien-like landscapes. Environment artist Aaron Contreras said, "Elements of ancient ruins and abandoned rural villages soon became a necessary addition to obtain the visual variety and gameplay needed for the player experience."

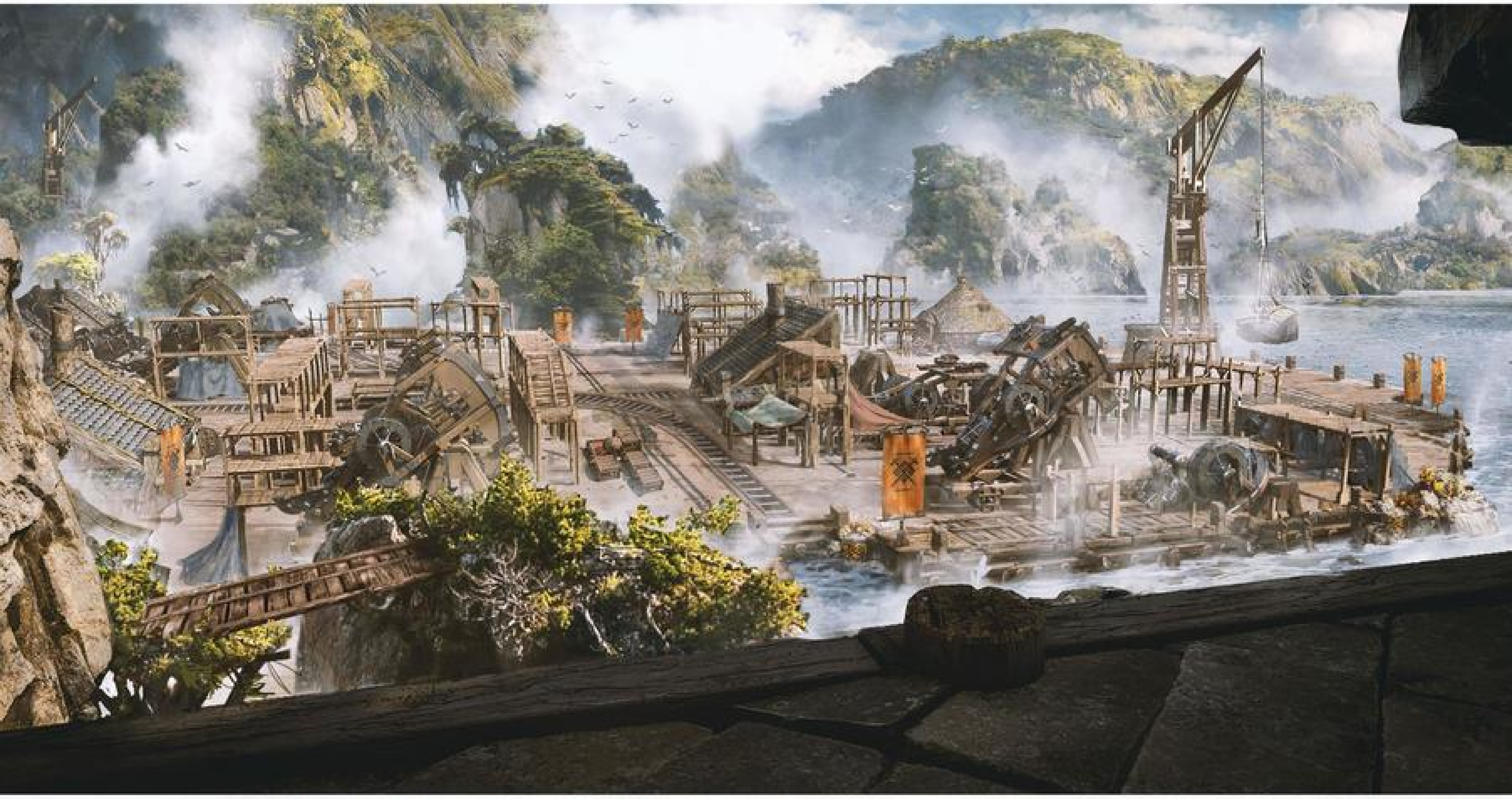
Concepts for Svartalfheim's mountain. Artists: Sukru Gilman, Brandon Cha (top); Paul Coda, Marco Fuhrman, Brandon Cha (bottom)



The team's goal when creating the mountain in Svartalfheim was to make an ancient place where Dwarven smiths would take their creations to be blessed over the years. It had to give the appearance of having been around for a long time. Environment artist Paul Coda took his extensive geology knowledge and applied it to the mountain, creating a rugged, rocky environment that feels authentic while blending in fantastic mythological elements, such as the face in the peak.

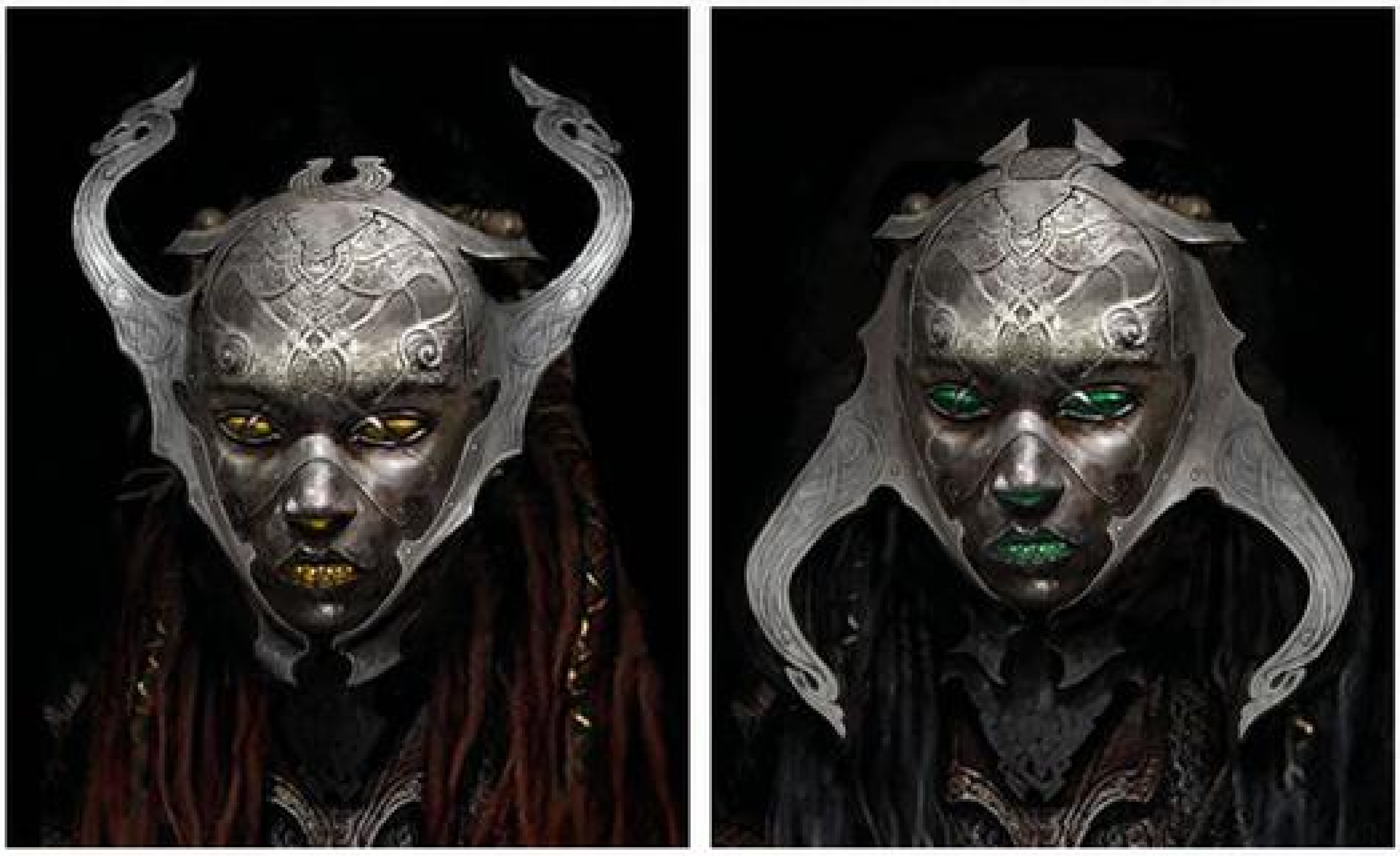
The bubbling pools of Svartalfheim. Artists: Sukru Gilman, Brandon Cha (top); Ryan Hong (bottom)

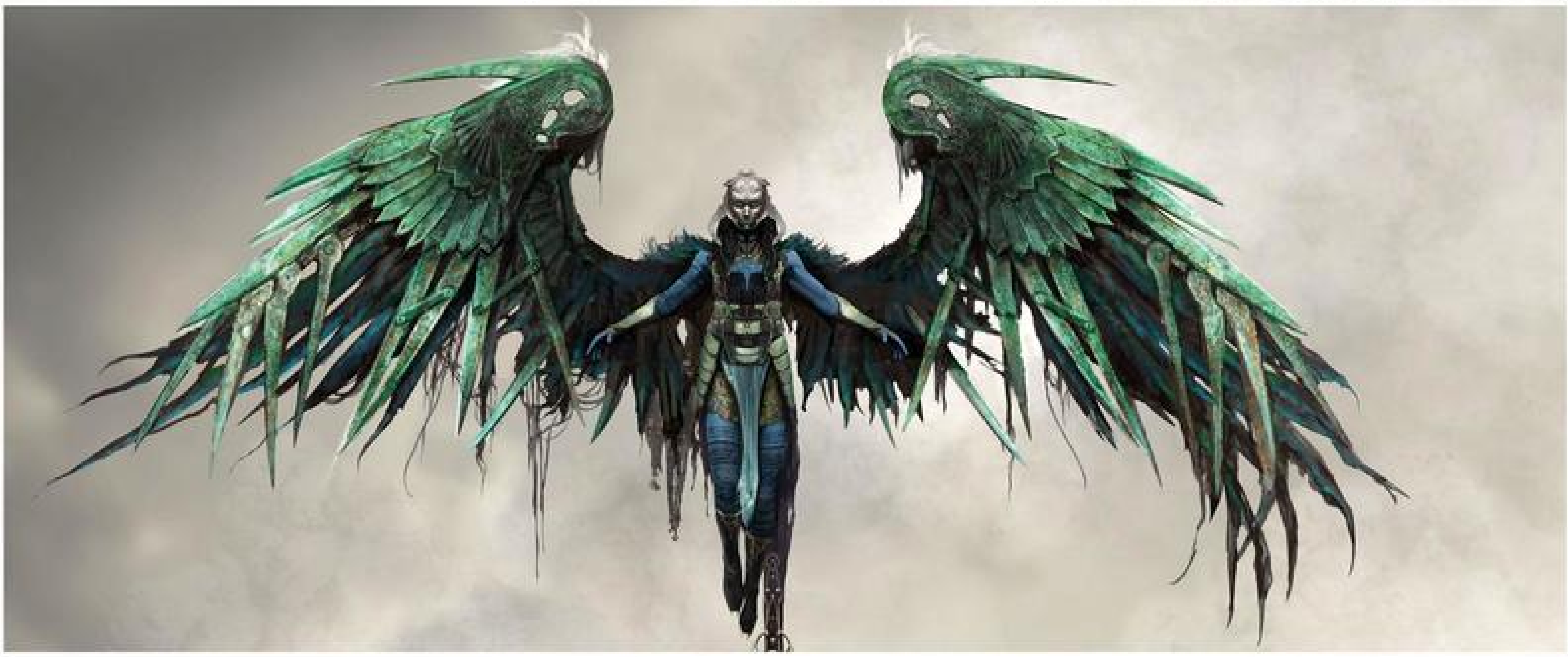


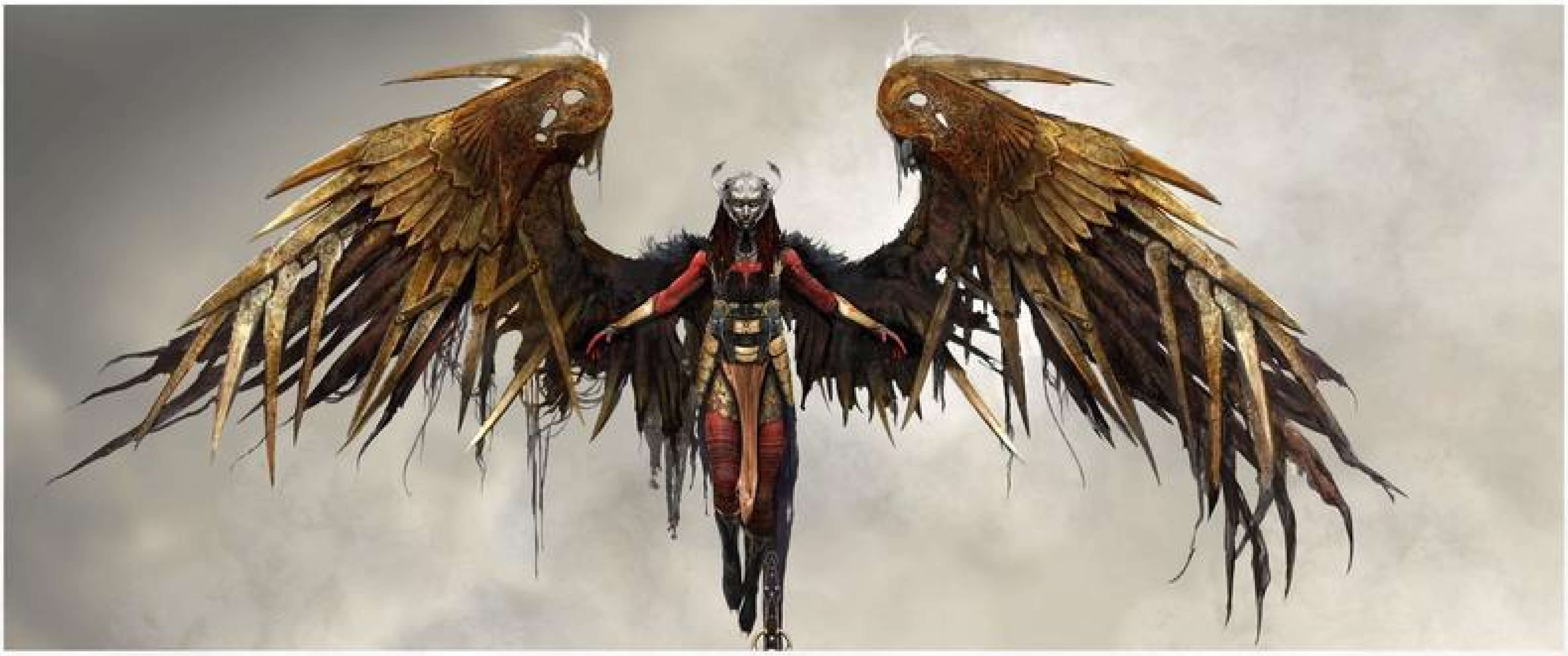


When players first enter Svartalfheim, they are greeted by wetlands. The area's towering travertine pools and bubbling water stand in contrast to the other realms. Making all the assets and building compelling compositions for a section like this was a challenging task. Environment artists Sukru Gilman and Tyler Siemers expended significant effort ensuring that a small kit of assets didn't look repetitive. That work created a natural feeling as players boat around, exploring old Dwarven relics.

The Twin Valkyries are a duo of enemies that share a very similar structure, but the artists had to determine how to make them stand apart with easily identifiable markers. Vance Kovacs completed the base body design, and José Cabrera provided helmet design direction, while Shan Qiao came up with the different hues: blue and green, then red and yellow. Qiao noted, "The opposite upper and lower horns on their helmets and the mirroring tattoo placement also helped push that dual nature of these twin characters."

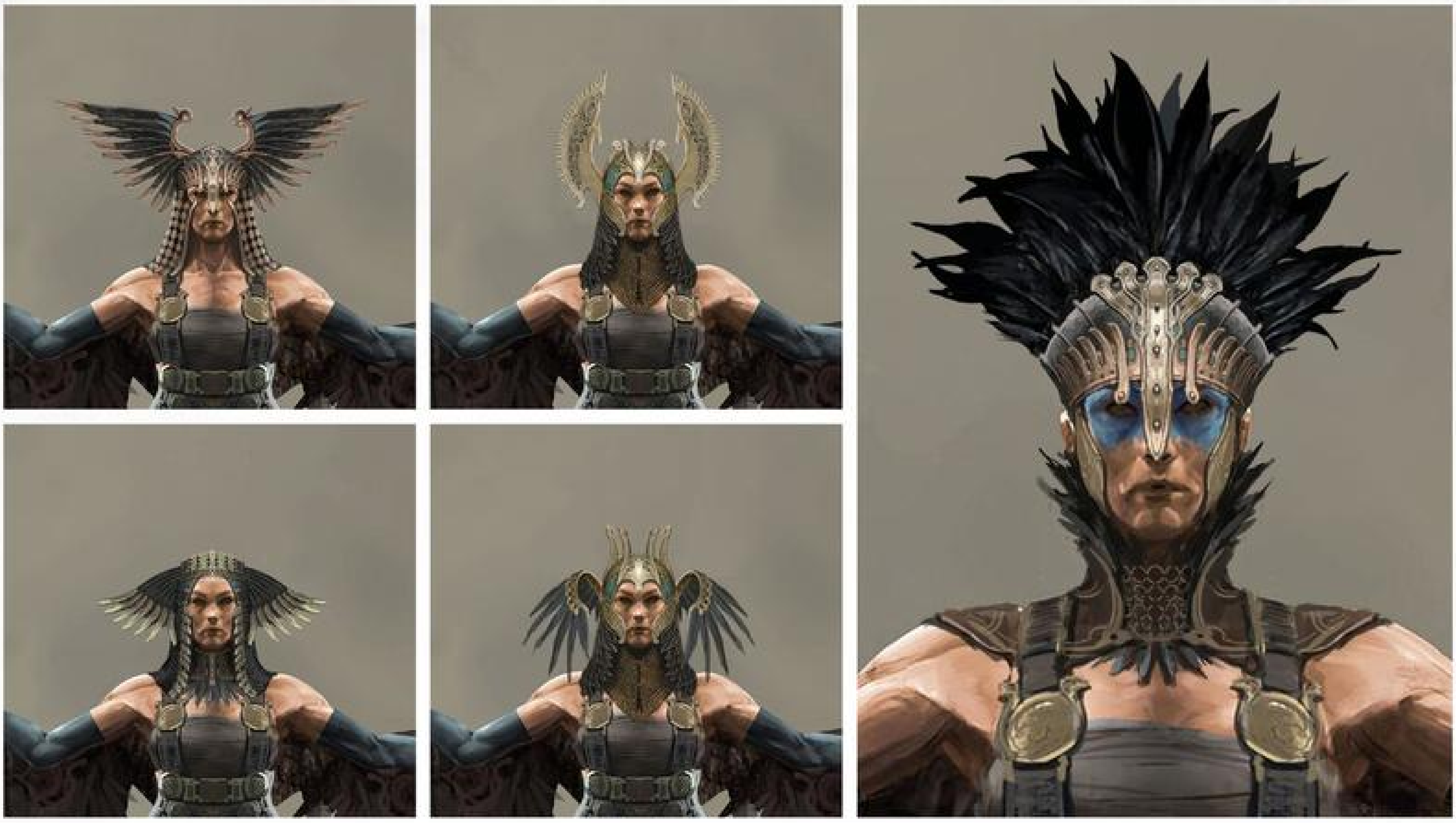


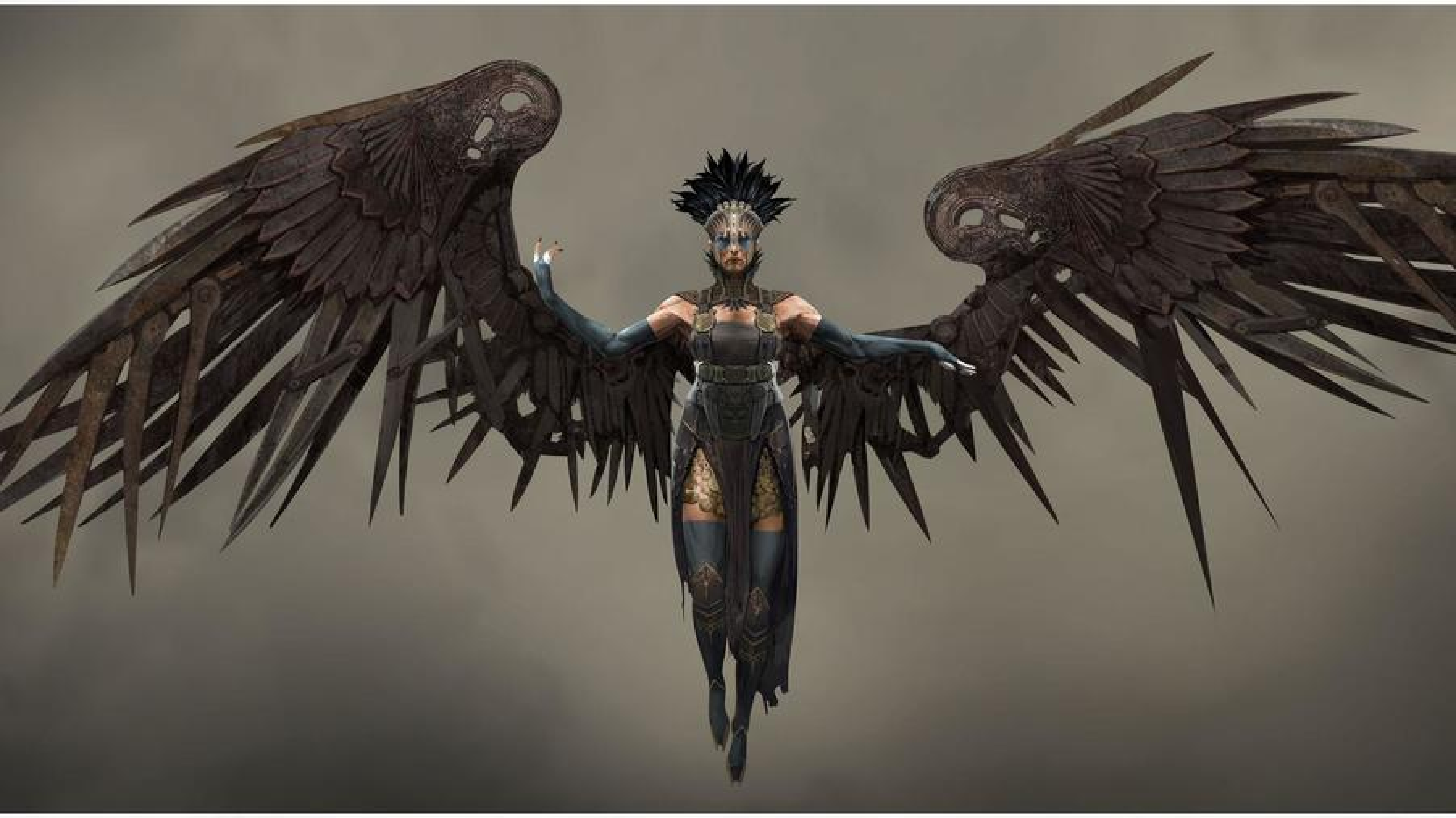




Color explorations for the Twin Valkyries. Artist: Shan Qiao

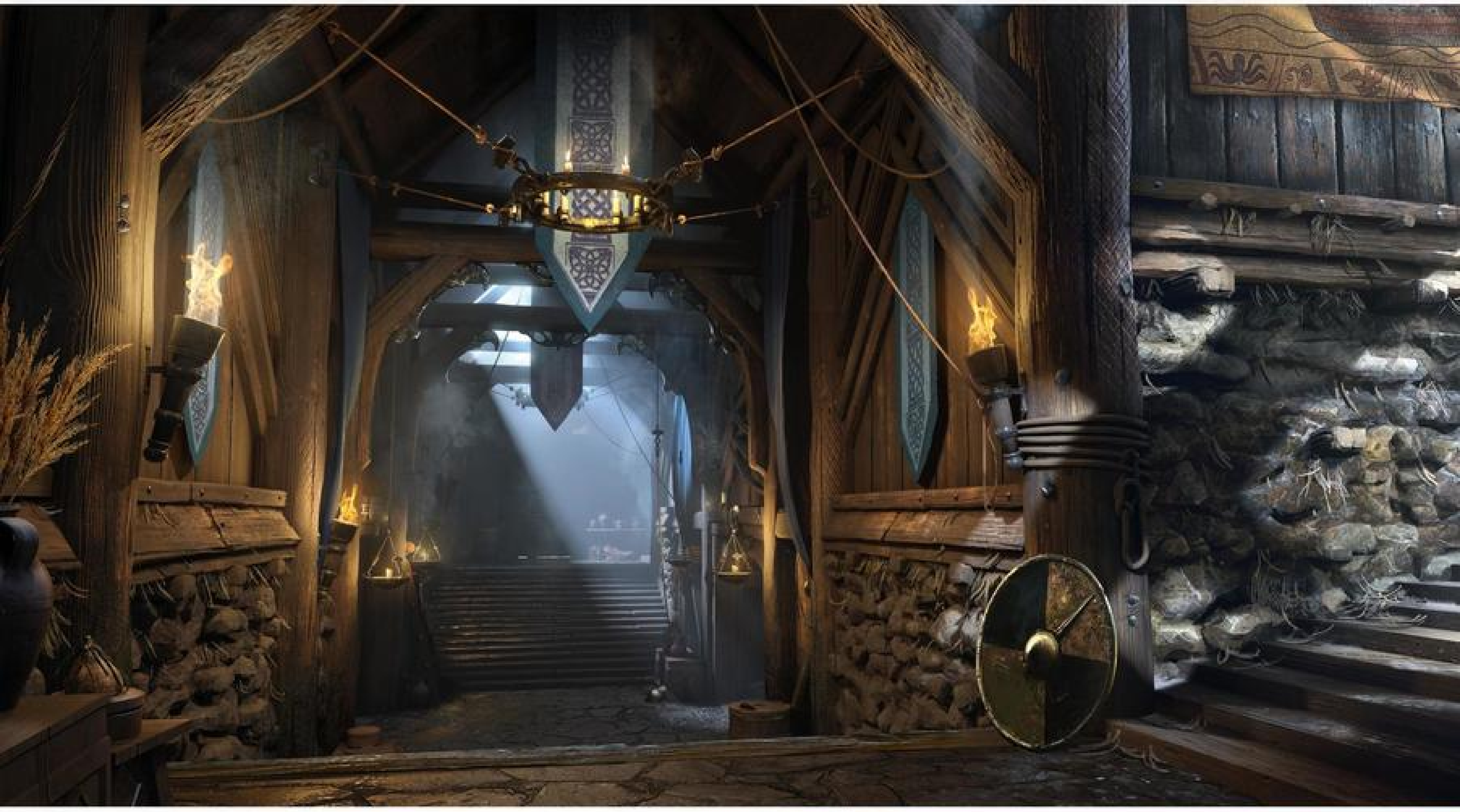
Helmet concepts for the Queen Valkyrie. Artist: Shan Qiao

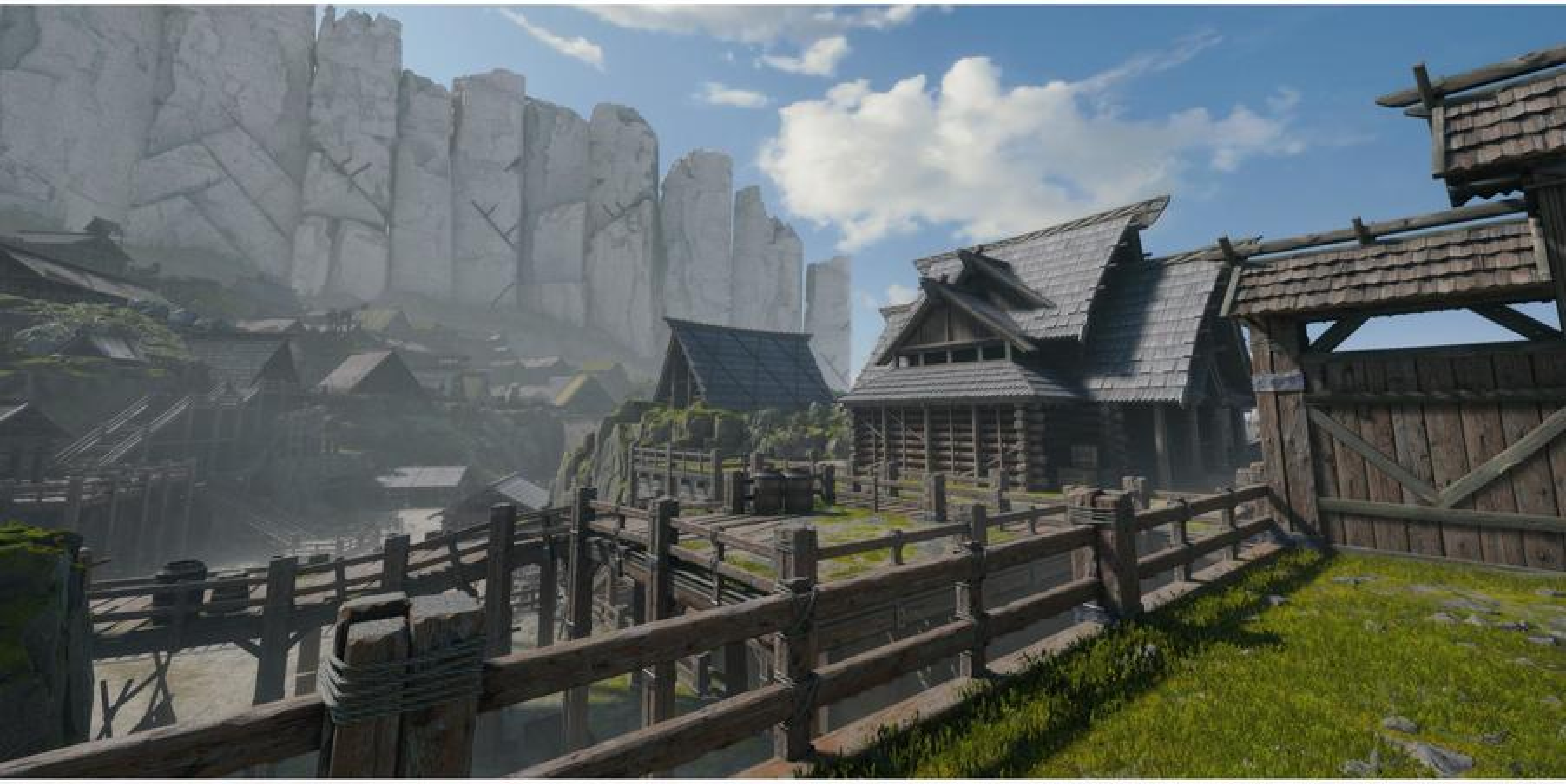




"The helmet exploration for the new Queen Valkyrie needed to reflect her connection with Odin," Qiao said. "We added feathers symbolizing the raven motif, along with blue Viking paint and an Asgardian green. Unlike the other Valkyries, who have fully covered helmets, we wanted to be able to show her expression and performance, so we left the front of her helmet open."

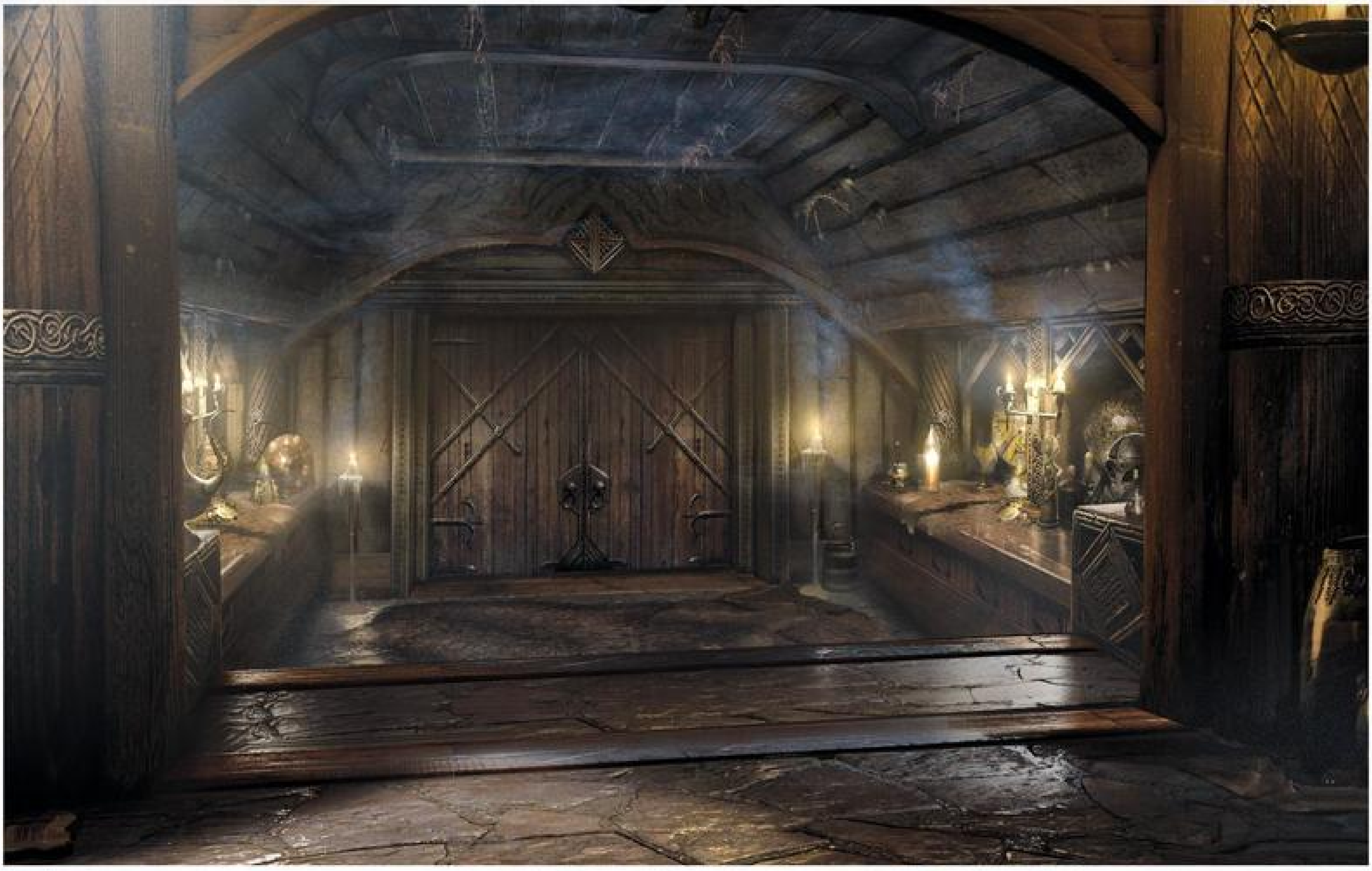
Refining Odin's home. Artists: Norris Lin (top); Timo Pihlajamaki (bottom)

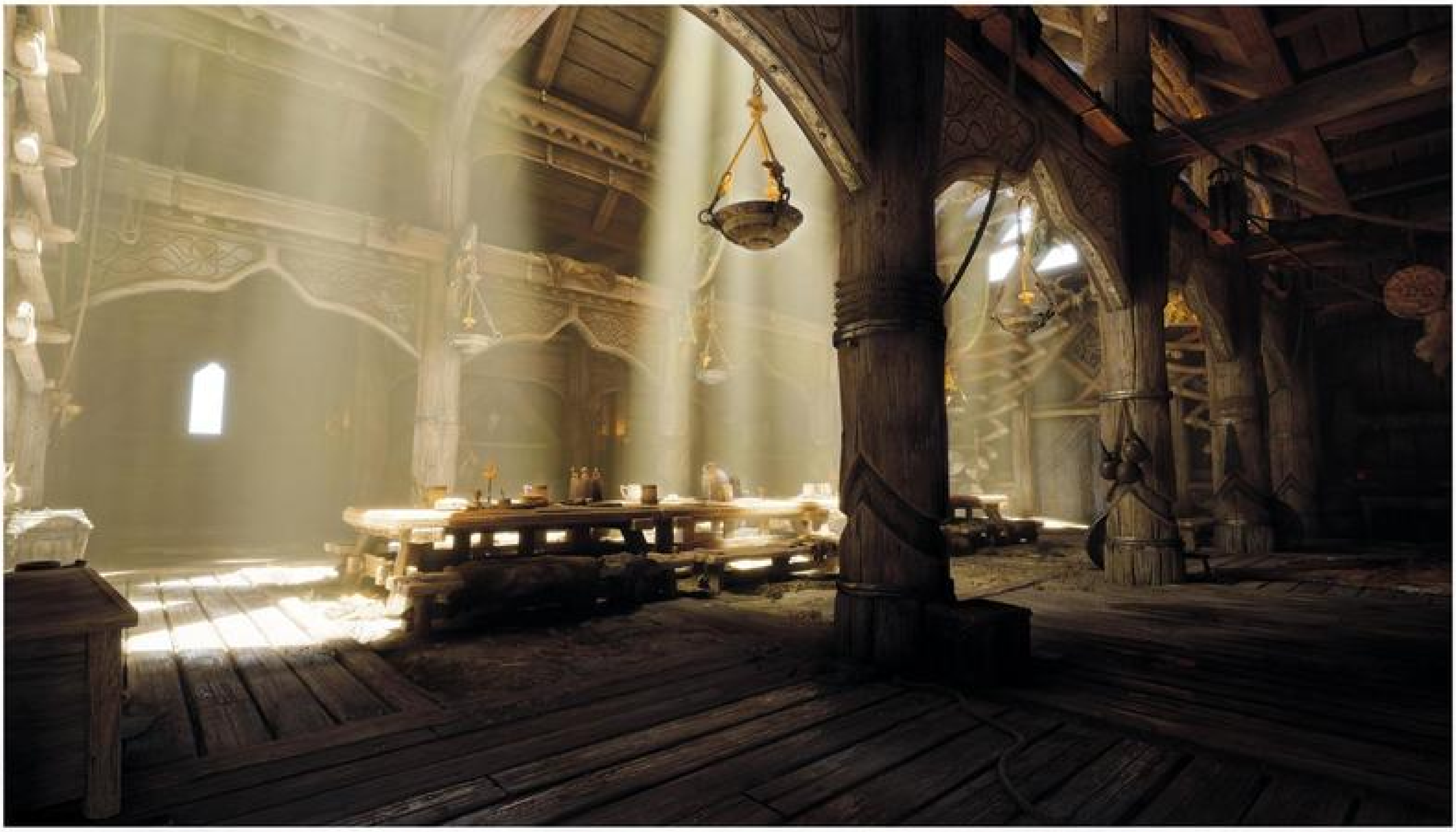




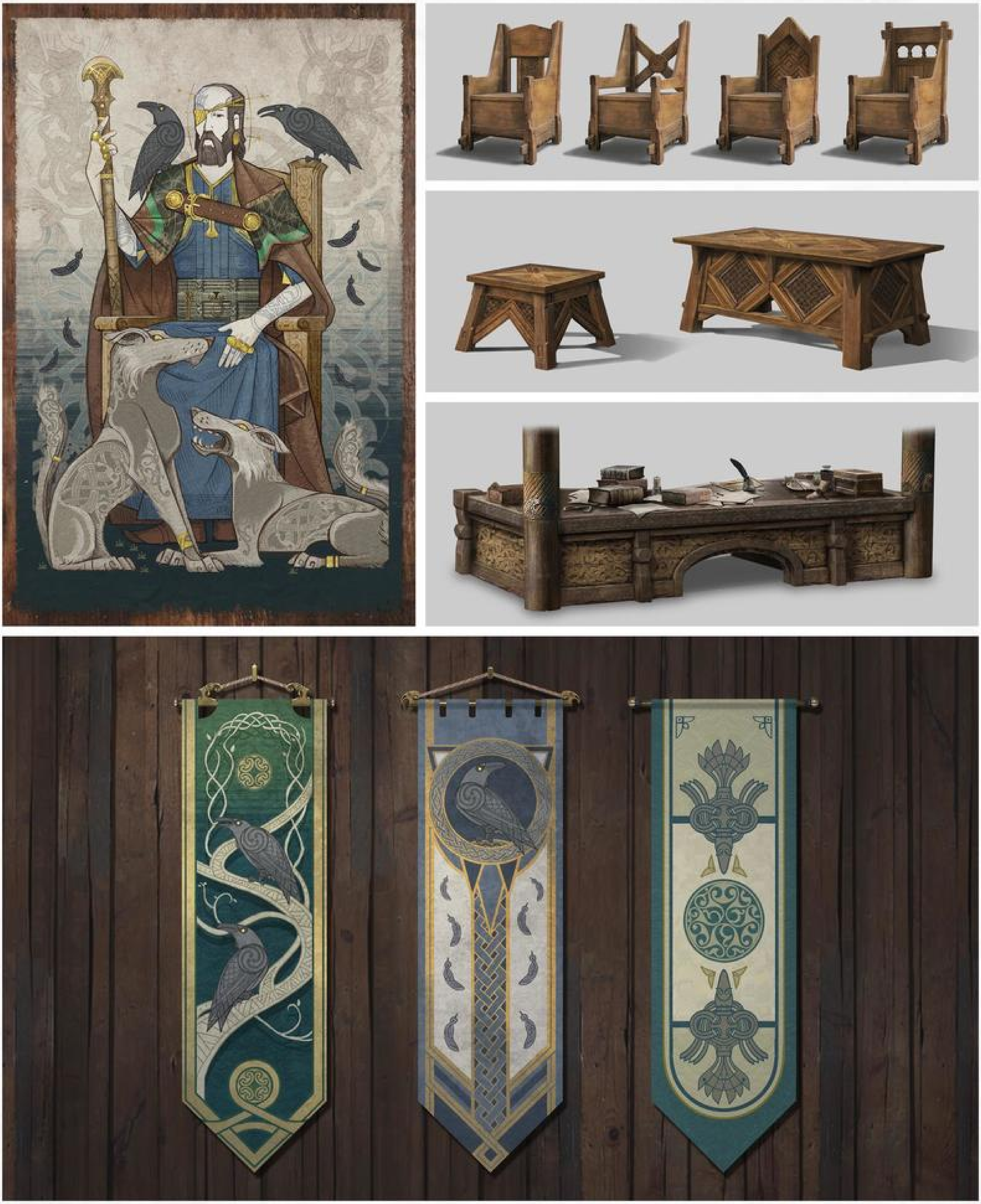
The original design for Odin's home placed the abode in such a way that Odin could see the player, no matter where they stood. The environment artists had to adjust along the way to maximize design and performance. Artist Timo Pihlajamaki noted, "The five-hundred-meter-high wall you climb surrounds it to give Odin as much protection as possible when Ragnarök hits. Technically it's built more like a vista, since this was a character-heavy area."

Odin's halls. Artists: Ryan Phair (top); Jon Arellano, Michael Kahn-Rose (bottom)





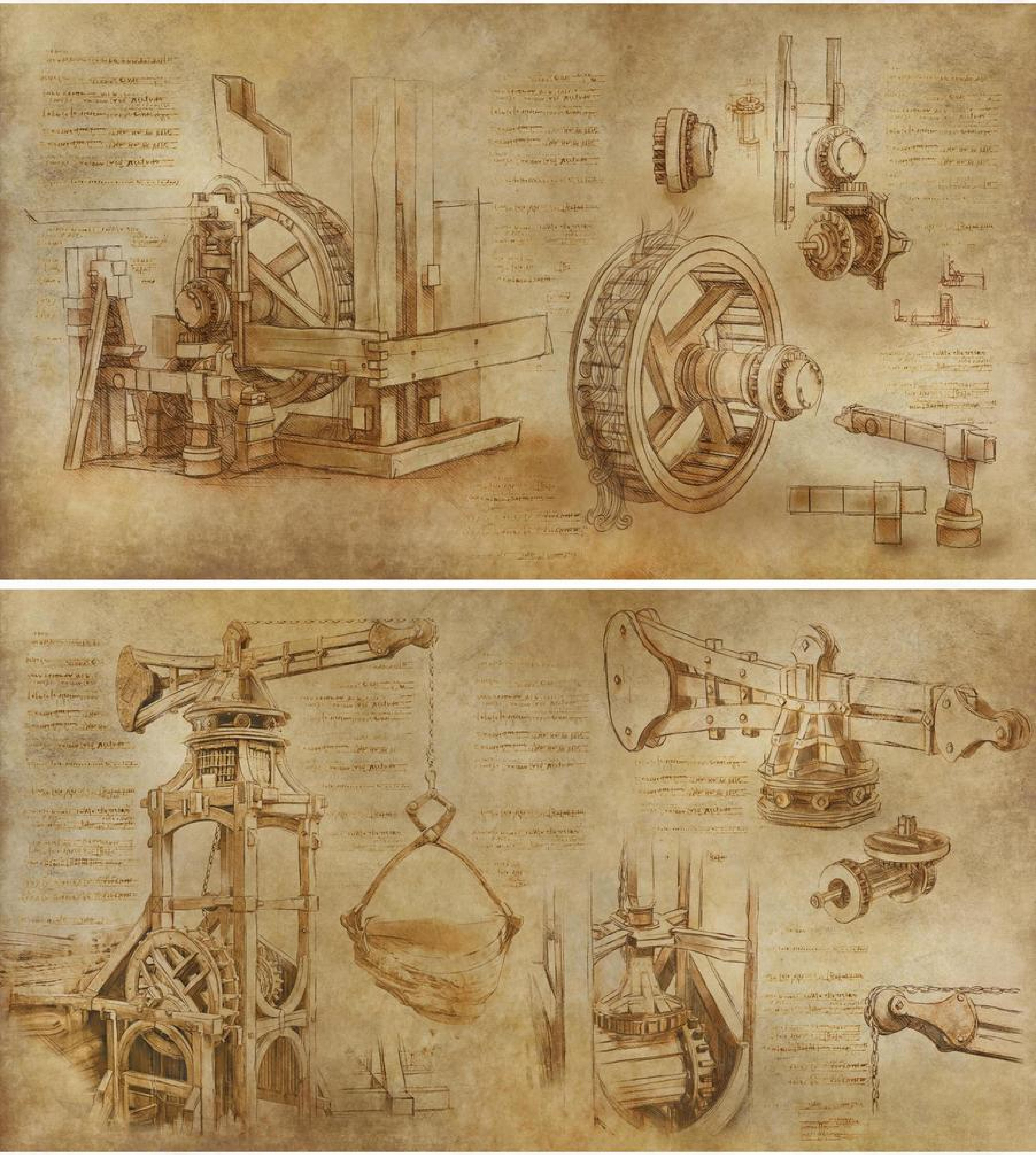
"Aiming for something more intimate and personal, we really wanted to play on the characters that inhabit Asgard, especially what someone like Odin might prioritize over extravagances," 3D environment artist Jon Arellano said. "It was crucial to learn as much as possible about each character to find the best way to fill up every room and bring Odin's house to life."



Tapestry and furniture designs. Artists: Matteo Marjoram (top left and bottom); Mark Castanon (top right); MOOD (middle right)

These images further showcase how the team deepened the world through set dressing. They show multiple pieces of furniture, richly detailed tapestries, diagrams, and more. Berliner said, "Compared to *God of War*, we really upped the bar on this game, adding so much more to the world as we aimed to show off how unique each space is."

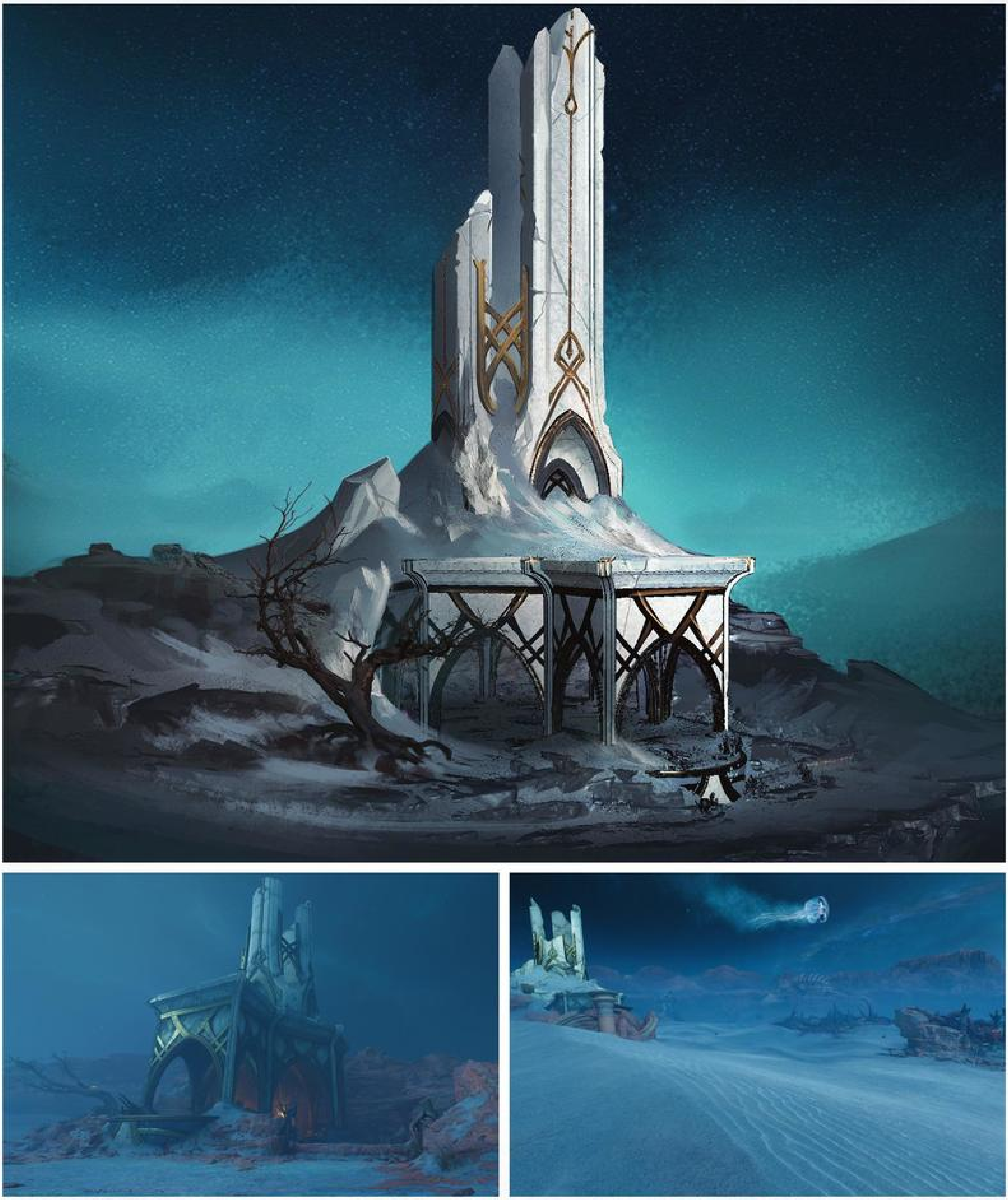
Equipment diagrams. Artist: MOOD



Alfheim's bluffs. Artist: Jarrod Hale

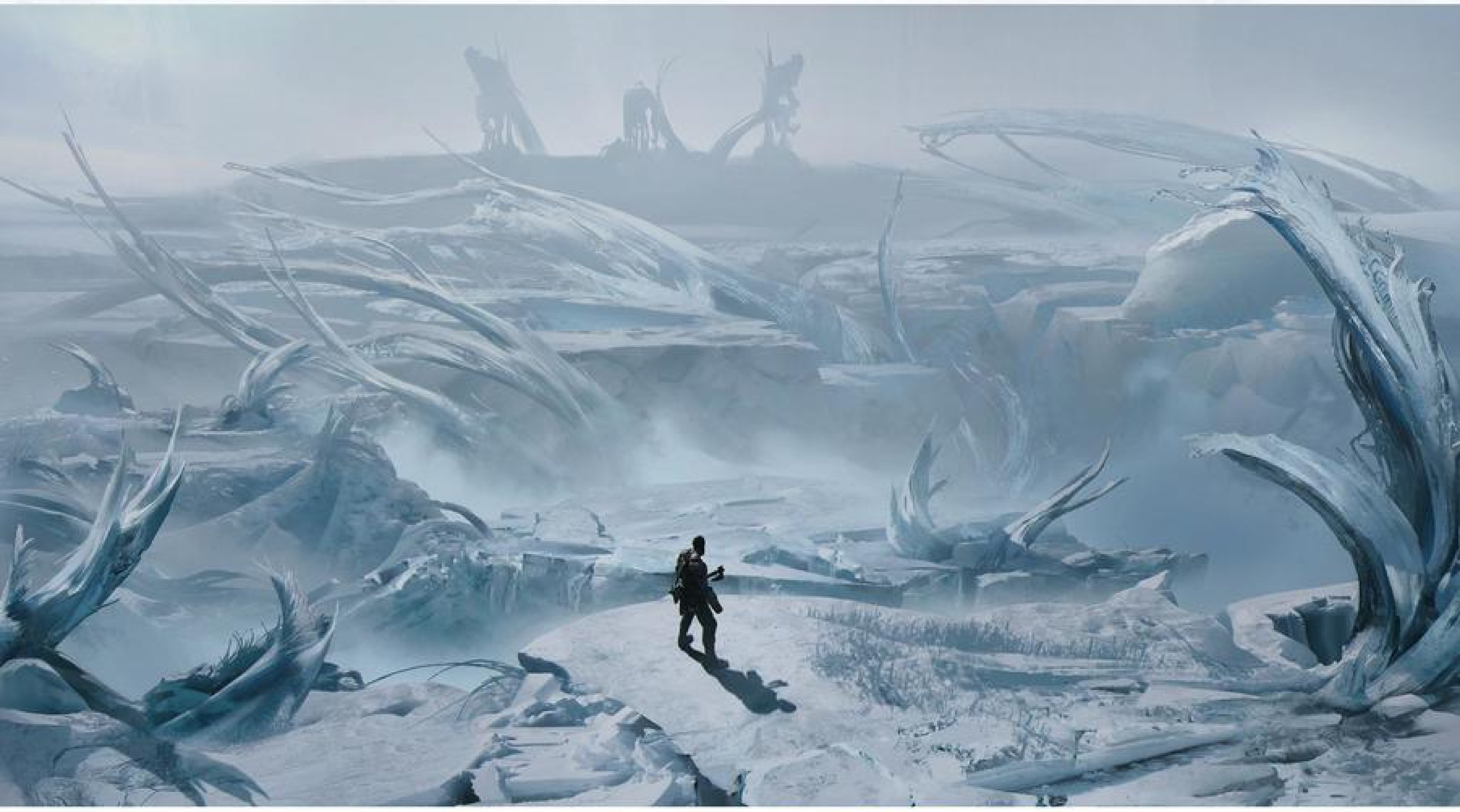
The bluffs serve as Alfheim's reintroduction in *Ragnarök*, so the environment artists wanted to show off a new ecosystem and perspective for returning players. The artists placed great importance on adding to the realms that players visited in the previous game, making them feel fresh while still familiar. While the ambition was sometimes tough to balance for practical reasons, it proved to be a useful starting position in exploring what new spaces players could discover.

Exploring scale in Alfheim. Artists: Adam Rehmann (top); Ryne Shearin, Willow Hermoso, Myriah Higgins, Katie Houston (bottom left); Brianna Gibson, Willow Hermoso, Myriah Higgins, Katie Houston (bottom right)



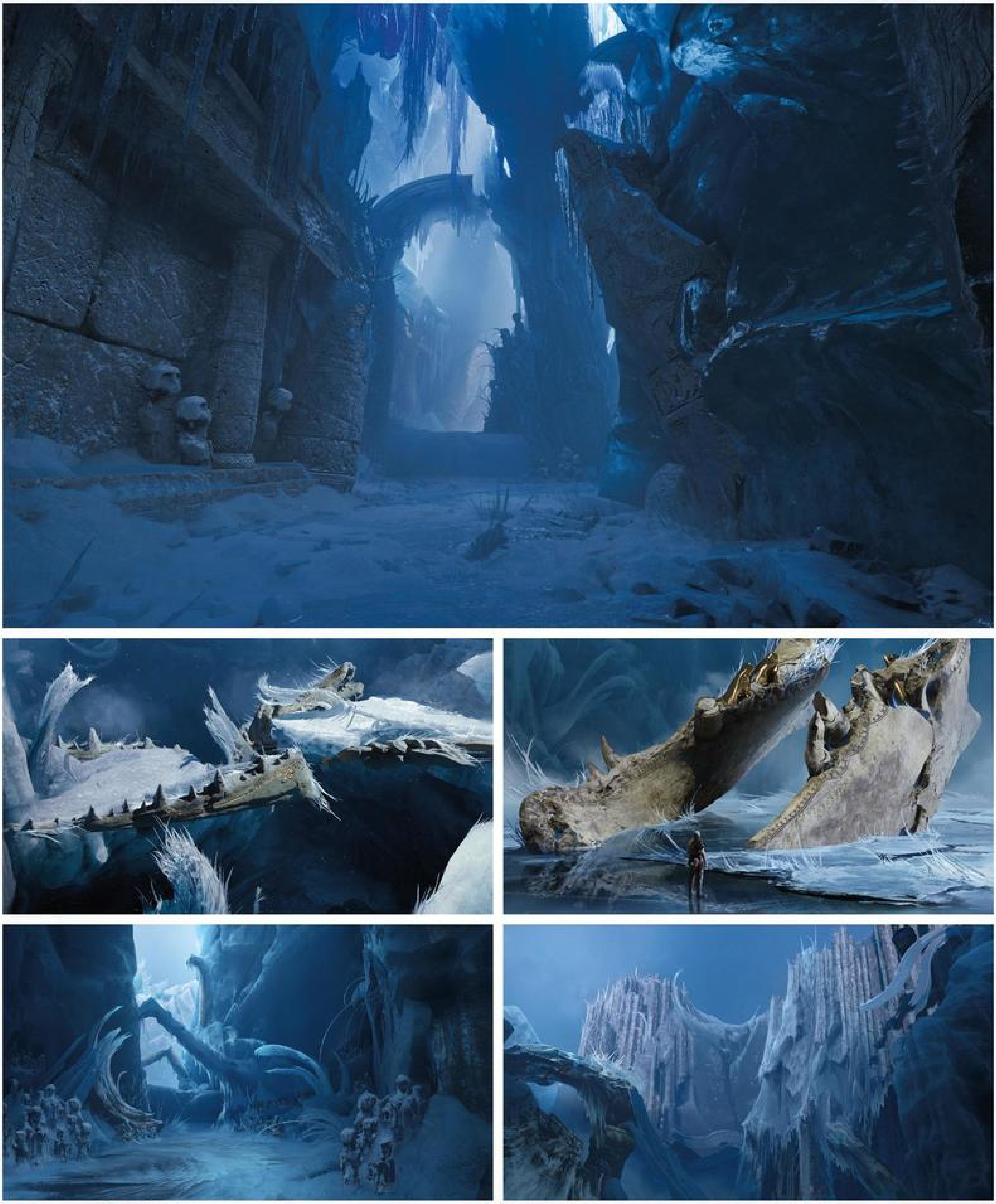
With the dramatic scale of the game, the team needed help building out everything they designed and hoped to take across the finish line. Bluepoint Games partnered with Santa Monica Studio to support the exploration content in Alfheim. The studio helped the environment artists cover some major unknowns. After onboarding Bluepoint and communicating the game's lore and visual language, artist Adam Rehmann helped the team finish out the Alfheim level.

Mist field concepts. Artists: Abe Taraky (top); Kevin Quinn, Ethan Ayer, Mario Wiechec (bottom)



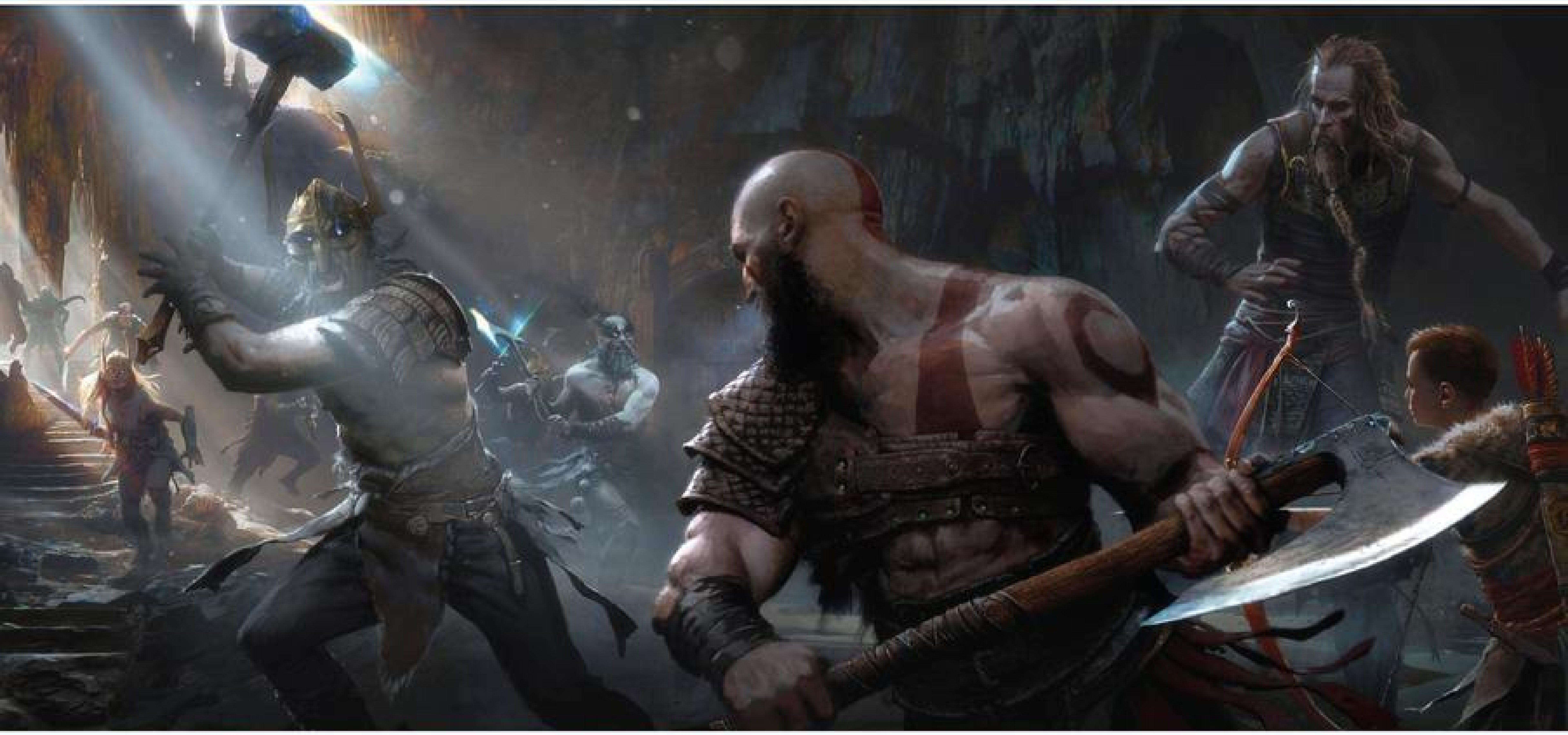
Niflheim's mist fields are so unlike any environment, the artists had difficulty finding real-world reference to ground the scenic art. Senior vista artist Ethan Ayer said, "For the vista, we looked at crevasses in large glaciers as an inspiration to fracture the ground and create large islands of ice. All the shapes were made by procedurally breaking up a plane and then sculpting the individual chunks derived from it."

Pushing Niflheim's rough edges. Artists: Kevin Quinn, Mario Wiechec (top); Abe Taraky (middle); Norris Lin (bottom)



"The shape language in Niflheim is wild," environment artist Thomas May said. "As we work on the levels, I think the unconscious impulse for many of us is to sand down flyaway edges, to resolve shapes in a grounded way, and to apply a sense of gravity and grounding as we nest objects into a cohesive scene. This area was interesting, because we had to really fight that tendency in order to preserve its character."

THANK YOU TO ALL THE INCREDIBLY CREATIVE AND TALENTED MEMBERS OF THE SMS DEV TEAM THAT CONTRIBUTED TO BRINGING *GOD OF WAR RAGNARÖK* TO LIFE.



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